

Veterans Affairs

relating them to a standard of living directly linked with minimum federal civil service wages. Some hon. members considered it would be very difficult for the minister to persuade his colleagues in the cabinet to accept this proposition, one which was first put forward in 1918 or 1919. The veterans' organizations had made representations on this subject for many, many years. However, the minister was able to bring forward this legislation in 1973.

We are proud of the way in which the minister has kept the budget of his department in line with the requirements of the men and women who are its responsibility. I note that in 1972 the budget provided for \$432 million, and that for 1974-75 the estimate is \$597 million—an increase of \$165 million for the 200,000 people in this country who receive pension benefits at some level. Taking into account the minister's distinguished war record, I am sure most members of the House are willing to accept the hon. gentleman's word, coming as it does from one who is a veteran himself.

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I am entering into this debate at a late stage because I feel I should be at least on record as favouring the position taken by the mover and seconder of this motion. The question of the future of the Veterans' Land Act has been debated over and over again in the past two years, and it should now be clear to the government that its decision to terminate this important program was an unfortunate one.

My hon. friend from Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) has pointed out many times that to terminate the VLA would be to break faith with veterans who were told in all sincerity that their sacrifices in war would not be forgotten. There simply is no justification for ending this program. One reason which, in itself, is sufficient ground for its continuation is that there are still veterans who, for a variety of reasons, have not taken advantage of the act. All of us know the main reason why many thousands of veterans, qualified under the legislation, have not made application for loans. In the period immediately following World War II a man could buy a pretty nice home for \$18,000, the limit placed on VLA advances. At that time, half-acre lots were plentiful in most parts of the country. A veteran could purchase an existing home, or build one himself, and still stay within the loan limit. There were homes on the market in almost every area, and building costs were within the reach of those who preferred to build.

All those conditions have changed. In the past few years, building costs have skyrocketed and at the same time it has been increasingly difficult for veterans to acquire existing homes. Moreover, it is no longer practical for anyone, veteran or otherwise, to expect to find a building lot anywhere near the half-acre size required by the VLA regulations. In fact, it is just about impossible to find a lot of that size in many areas of the country; and if he did find one, the average person simply could not afford to buy it. In any case, if money were spent on such a lot, there would be none left with which to build a house.

My hon. friends have already pointed out that the National Housing Act has been brought up to date from time to time; that it is now possible to get NHA loans of up to \$30,000, or even more if one plans to buy a multiple dwelling. Under NHA, a purchaser can get by with a lower

[Mr. Guay (St. Boniface).]

down payment than a veteran buying a home under VLA; and there are other directions in which the veteran is not getting a fair shake under this, his own program. The whole VLA program should be overhauled. It should reflect today's conditions in the housing market; it should also reflect the differing conditions which exist in various parts of the country. For instance, while it may still be possible to find a building lot large enough to qualify under VLA in some of the smaller communities, it would be ridiculous to expect to find such a lot in Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal or any other city or large town. It is like saying to a veteran that he will just have to move to an area where such building lots are available, even if it means uprooting his family, giving up his job and leaving the area in which he has decided he wants to live. None of that makes any sense, but that is exactly what we are expected to accept as valid reasons why the VLA program should be phased out.

● (1710)

The Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald), a very capable gentleman who I believe is trying to do a good job in his ministry, must surely realize that veterans have not been treated fairly with respect to the VLA program. While the minister cites the low percentage of eligible veterans who have taken advantage of the program in recent years, he does not tell us that the main reason is that the VLA terms of reference are so restrictive that they are not relevant to today's housing market. The lot size required is out of line with the established building lot sizes in most communities today, and the ceiling on loans of \$18,000—I believe a veteran receives only \$15,400 of that amount—does not cover more than half the cost of dwellings on the market in most parts of the country.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, instead of rushing to put an end to this program, we should bring it into line with today's requirements and conditions, and then we would see whether or not these qualified veterans would come forward in large numbers to take advantage of it.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Madam Speaker, I was very interested in the remarks of the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay) concerning partisanship in veterans affairs. It has always appeared to me that veterans' legislation was based a great deal on non-partisanship, partly because as the minister indicated, in 1945 there was a large number of veterans. While the number of veterans since that time has decreased, it is safe to say that the members who have participated in this debate are well aware of fathers, brothers or relatives who served in wartime, and they well know the contribution made by veterans on behalf of this nation. Thus we have always treated veterans' legislation differently from any other.

The reason this discussion is taking place today does not have to do with whether or not the Conservatives decided that there would be a cut-off date, or whether the date was extended by a previous parliament. It goes back to a decision made in the last parliament. The last parliament was a minority parliament, and it was very easy for all members to be magnanimous in their treatment of veterans. I would point out to one of the previous speakers that part of this magnanimity arose from the fact that a com-