

*Veterans Affairs*

the minister stated his position. It is to be found at pages 434 and 435 of *Hansard*. He said this:

The motion before the House today asks that the government consider the possibility of extending the March 31 deadline for qualified veterans to apply under the Veterans' Land Act. In case there should be any doubt left in somebody's mind, I wish to emphasize at the outset that I am quite prepared to give such an undertaking right now.

Later, the Minister of Veterans Affairs said, again:

If, after looking at all the evidence, I can conclude that the deadline should be extended, then I would be prepared to so recommend.

Again, on page 435, the minister had this to say:

Since this motion has been brought forward, I am certainly glad to listen to the discussions today. In the light of these discussions, I will be happy to consider the whole matter again and to make a recommendation to the government.

That was the story. There had been months of refusal on the part of the government. I think I am justified in saying "the government" rather than "the minister" because some of us are aware of the conflict the hon. gentleman has with other members of the cabinet. But for months we met with a refusal to extend the act beyond March 31, 1974. We thought our unanimous motion of November 9, 1973, had done the trick. But it hadn't. However, the motion the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe put down on March 12 did result in a firm promise by the minister that the matter would be considered.

That was on March 12, and the deadline was March 31, so things had to move quickly. Sure enough, on Tuesday, March 26, 1974, as noted at page 856, the Minister of Veterans Affairs rose and made a statement on motions to the effect that he was giving consideration to the whole matter of extending the act and that the necessary bill would be brought in right away. It was. On Thursday, March 28, 1974, we gave that bill second reading, consideration in committee of the whole, and third reading; and we passed it and sent it to the other place.

I regard all of this as one of the highlights of the minority parliament, one of the major accomplishments of the Twenty-ninth Parliament of Canada; the fact that we got the government to change its position with respect to this one feature of the Veterans' Land Act, namely, that it was to expire on March 31, 1974. The bill which this House passed on Thursday, March 28, 1974, extended the life of that legislation by one year, so that it now expires on March 31, 1975.

I refer again to the fact that when we were in committee of the whole on that bill, Bill C-17 of last session, now chapter 3 of the Statutes of Canada of 1974, I moved an amendment which would permit the matter to be raised again after September 30, 1974. That proposal was not only passed by the House but the minister himself, speaking in the debate on the amendment, said he and the government welcomed it. The only conclusion I can draw is that he welcomed the possibility that in the fall of 1974 the discussion would again come forward. I trust he still does. In any event, the motion was carried unanimously, it was written into the law of the land, and it is on the basis of that provision in the law that today's debate is taking place.

The only thing the House can do in this debate, formally and officially, is to ask the Minister of Veterans Affairs to

review the question of the cut-off date, now March 31, 1975, and report back to this chamber on the result of his review within 15 sitting days after this motion is passed by the House. In a few moments I want to refer to some of the other things I believe the minister should consider as well. But that is what the motion asks for, since by law that is all we can ask for at this time. I plead as strongly as I can that the House pass this motion. Passing it will not extend the Veteran's Land Act; it will not make any other change. But it will say to the minister that we want this matter reconsidered.

● (1600)

Last time we went through this, Mr. Speaker, the government was in a minority position. When the parties in opposition made their position clear, they carried some weight. The government wanted to be in a majority position so that it could do the things it wants to do. Well, it is in that position now, and I submit it has all the authority it needs to take action on the Veterans' Land Act. I hope members of the House, in all parties, will express the same views that they expressed last year, namely that this matter should be reviewed and the act extended.

Certainly, I would feel that if the motion were opposed, that if members on the government side were to do the unthinkable and vote against the motion, it would put in doubt the motives of a year ago when a minority government went along with what we were seeking. The more I sit and listen to the minister in the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, the more I am satisfied that his sympathies with the veterans are genuine and that he is fighting for them in his department and in the cabinet. I think we owe to this minister the support of the House of Commons, and we can give it to him today or tomorrow, whenever this debate comes to a conclusion, by voting unanimously for this motion.

Now, sir, I have said that so far as the actual motion is concerned, all it can do is request the minister to review the March 31, 1975, cut-off date. I want to ask that he look at other things as well, and I suspect that most of those who will take part in this debate will do the same thing. I think he should take another look at the provision that set October 31, 1968, as the last date by which one could get a qualification certificate to get a grant under the Veterans' Land Act. I feel very strongly that this provision should be reviewed.

I believe the amount of money available as a loan under the Veterans' Land Act, which is fixed at a maximum of \$18,000—less 20 per cent which the veteran must have, so it is really only \$15,400—is unrealistic and unreasonable in light of today's costs. I also think the whole question of the size of lot that has to be obtained should be reviewed. In saying these things I am admitting, indeed asserting, as all of us do, that times have changed and that although the Veterans' Land Act originally had in mind those veterans who wanted to go on smallholdings and do a bit of farming, raise a few carrots and potatoes if you will, what most of the veterans are wanting now is a piece of land on which to build a home and retire. I do not think it is an argument against extension of the rights under the Veterans' Land Act to say that is all the veterans now want. As we said in our motion of November 9, 1973, "it is the view