

Income Tax

Forces and have served in armed conflict are faced with in today's society.

I would like to refer to another issue which indicates the attitude of that particular Department. The committee heard from native veterans associations. They have a multitude of problems in attempting to establish the very fact that they should be entitled to the same veterans' benefits as other Canadians who are not natives. For example, Indian associations across the country told us that the Indian war veterans experienced difficulty in receiving the benefits due to them for having served in the wars. Those difficulties continue today. According to the complaints, those difficulties take one of two forms. Either the veteran has been required to give up benefits as a status Indian in order to receive veterans' benefits, or he has been forced to relinquish veterans' benefits in order to continue receiving benefits as a status Indian. The native veteran is placed in a Catch-22 situation. Either the native veteran gives up the natural right as a status Indian in order to receive benefits, or he does not receive the benefits in order to keep the native status. This is totally unacceptable. This was certainly unacceptable to our committee. We made strong recommendations to the Department of Veterans Affairs about what they should be doing in those instances. Do you know what the response of the Department of Veterans Affairs was? The Department said to the leader of those groups "If you want to go around the country and identify those natives who served in the war years, then we are prepared to take a look at any grievances they may have." The response from the leaders of those native groups was, "We do not have the financial resources or means to talk to every native person in the country to determine whether, in fact, he served in the Armed Forces during the war years and whether he may have grievances against the Department of Veterans Affairs." This is a serious problem. This Department must address that problem in a very reasonable manner.

I have another letter from an individual who tells me that the major economic problems that face War Veterans Allowance recipients is the need for assistance in the care of their wives who are also advancing in years and who have not reached the age of 65 when they will qualify for senior citizens' benefits. There is no allowance provided for dental care and dentures, optical assistance—glasses, etc.—prescription drugs, or prosthesis needs following mastectomy operations. The letter goes on to state that the cost of these services has risen at a phenomenal rate and the payment of these necessary benefits has greatly depreciated the purchasing power of the present allowance in the necessary areas of rent, tax, heat, light, clothing, food, etc. This veteran says that they require this aid in order to enable them to share each other's company and happiness during the twilight years of their lives.

I do not want to assist any attempt to talk out this motion so that it would not be adopted by the House. Therefore, having said that, I conclude.

Mr. Dan McKenzie (Winnipeg-Assiniboine): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the Hon. Member for St. Catharines (Mr. Reid) for introducing this simple, straightforward motion. He placed it on the Order Paper in

November, 1981. Unfortunately, the Government should have taken some action at least two years ago and sent a letter to the Hon. Member for St. Catharines that the Government was going to introduce his recommendation to increase the allowance from \$100 to \$1,000 as a result of economic conditions. We should not even be debating this issue today.

What the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. de Corneille) and the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Campbell) are overlooking is the fact that veterans are aging. Veterans are not getting younger and healthier. They cannot wait for all these long, detailed studies and reviews, nor listen anymore to these things "being under active consideration". This is a simple, straightforward matter that should have been dealt with two years ago. We do not have to wait for some long-ranging comprehensive view of veterans affairs before a simple motion such as this is carried through and changes made to the Income Tax Act, or whatever has to be done.

The Parliamentary Secretary mentioned that they are consulting with the Department of Health and Welfare. I hope the Government is not looking at phasing out the Department of Veterans Affairs and bringing it under the umbrella of the Department of National Health and Welfare. I will give the Government warning right now that it will hear the loudest protest it has ever heard. We want the Department of Veterans Affairs to remain as it is. This is a special interest group and we want them treated in that manner. We do not want the veterans lumped in with the Department of National Health and Welfare. I hope you are not entertaining any ideas along those lines.

At the last meeting of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs we had last year I tried to have a motion passed in the Committee that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs deal on a continuous basis with veterans' problems and call for progress reports from the Minister. This would have made sense. Our veterans are aging and their health is not improving. We need fast, fast action, not years and years of studies and delays.

I am in my eleventh year in this place. When I first came here I heard about these studies. We have had enough studies into veterans affairs. We have an excellent report which came from another place. The veterans organizations present excellent documentation year after year. It is not necessary to have any more studies. A study is just a stalling tactic. The simple things being requested will not cost millions and millions of dollars. I would like the Parliamentary Secretary to convey this message. Veterans are aging. They will not live to the age of 100 or 150. We have to do something now, not years from now.

We have asked the Minister repeatedly in the House to make statements on motions as to what progress was being made in the Department. We never hear a word from him. Every time we ask a question in the House, it does not matter whether it is myself or the Hon. Member for Malpeque (Mr. Gass) or anybody else, we hear there is a study or a review