

Veterans Affairs

We understand that there are other possible inequities, and therefore we recommend that:

This, Mr. Speaker, is the centrepiece of my notice of motion today. This is the recommendation we want to support. Incidentally, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine (Mr. McKenzie) would like to have been here to take part in this debate today but he had to attend a funeral in Winnipeg of a friend. The recommendation is:

(a) the Government appoint a Committee composed of officials from both the government and veterans associations to review and update those recommendations of the Woods Committee which have not been implemented and to identify, study and make recommendations about the anomalies which still exist in the treatment of veterans and their survivors;

(b) the Committee study the apparent inequity to a divorced spouse who under existing legislation has no entitlement to benefits under the Pension Act and the War Veterans Allowance Act; and

(c) the Committee study the apparent inequity of the way in which veterans are compensated for periods spent as prisoners of war.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I defy anyone to establish completely the damage done to those people incarcerated in a prisoner of war camp. They never knew whether they were going to get out alive or when. They never knew whether or not they were ever going to see their loved ones again. I can understand the difficulty members of the Commission have, but I believe consideration should be given to this situation so that we can all feel these Canadians are receiving adequate and fair treatment.

Now, in the submission the Royal Canadian Legion made to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs last night, they said, with regard to another area of interest, deductions for income tax—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order. Is the Hon. Member presently quoting from a statement made before the Committee last night?

Mr. Towers: Yes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): I should caution the Hon. Member about doing that because the rules forbid debate in the House on matters currently before Standing Committees of the House. The principle is that a matter cannot be in both places at the same time. I hope the Hon. Member will use extreme prudence in the way he presents his arguments.

Mr. Towers: I accept your direction, Mr. Speaker; I always appreciate your guidance. This has to do with the Estimates and a submission made by the representatives of the Legion. They will not be back again. It cannot be said that we are dealing with the same situation both in Committee and in the House, so I would hope you would just let me make this one point because it is pertinent to the case I am trying to make.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order. If I allow the Hon. Member to go ahead and quote directly from a presentation made before Committee, which Committee has not yet reported to the House, I would be encouraging him to breach the rules of the House. So the Hon. Member may still refer to the matter, if I may be helpful, by taking an indirect approach.

Possibly if he did not say that the matter is before the Committee at this time, well, that would be quite fair.

Mr. Towers: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments. Nevertheless, the point is simply this. The submission made by the Legion was that it had been told that the Act cannot be changed for another year or two. This concerns me because—I see the Chairman of the Committee here today and I am sure he would agree with me—we all know how slowly legislation moves in the House of Commons. When the suggestion is made that nothing will be forthcoming within the next year or two, you and I both know we should be into an election about that time and we will not have any opportunity of passing legislation then. Then when you go beyond the election, the matter is delayed further. So I find it very difficult to understand why these regulations cannot be studied to find out where these anomalies exist and action taken on them. We have to realize that these people we are talking about are getting older every year and we should do something along these lines for their benefit during this period of time. Otherwise, in a great many cases, it will be too late.

Therefore, I leave the suggestion with you, Mr. Speaker, that it is our responsibility as Members of the House to accept the recommendation from the other place and recognize that we too can fully appreciate that: "They Served, We Care".

Mr. Maurice Dupras (Labelle): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have a chance to participate in this debate. I do so not as Chairman of the Standing Committee and not to defend the Government, but as a war veteran. I do this as a duty to my friends who did not come back and to those who did but could not resume their activities in civilian life. I do this also because I have been involved with the work of the Committee for many years. I have been a witness to what not only this Government but many other Governments preceding this one have put in place, that is, what I consider to be perhaps the best veterans' social program anywhere on earth. That goes also for ex-prisoners of war. I do not think we could find anything comparable to the social and welfare programs we have adopted for war veterans. Because of this sense of satisfaction, I find I have a duty to take part in this debate and follow my friend, the esteemed and respected member of my Committee, the Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers).

The Hon. Member has three parts to his motion, but I would like to deal mainly with the Woods Committee report. I gather others will want to deal with other aspects of his motion. Having been a witness to the activities of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and the many times that the Legion has come before the Committee as a witness, I find it distressing and surprising that such a motion is introduced. To me, the record of the Canadian Legion speaks for itself. Reference was made a few minutes ago to the meeting last night. Without faulting anyone, I would nevertheless like to say that in the brief remarks made by the representative of members of the Canadian Legion, I was under the strong impression that this exercise of their coming to the committee was, for them, the