

Veterans Affairs

their past interest and concern in all matters affecting war veterans.

I want, also, to join with the hon. member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon) in his condemnation of the opening remarks of the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay), and to take issue with the hon. member for Welland (Mr. Railton) for implying that partisan politics are involved in this debate. Since my election in 1972 I have been impressed by the non-partisan approach which has been demonstrated by all parties in matters which affect veterans. It is precisely this attitude which has prompted me to speak on the motion before us, believing this to be a forum in which reasonable attitudes and approaches will be recognized.

I might add that I join with the hon. member for St. Boniface in his congratulations of the minister who is recognized as one of our great heroes and outstanding Canadians. I know he is concerned about the welfare of veterans. Indeed, he has demonstrated this concern and compassion during his tenure in office. I am certain the minister will be understanding of and sympathetic to reasonable arguments which are presented in this chamber, and I am equally confident that his compassion and generosity will prompt him to see justice is served and that he will reconsider the statement he made this afternoon.

I think it is important to note and record in *Hansard* that members on both sides of the House have paid tribute to our veterans, emphasizing the contributions they have made to Canadian society. Again, I am hopeful that before this debate is over our action will demonstrate unity in protecting the rights of veterans with respect to this most important issue.

Despite the minister's statement this afternoon I still remain confident that at the conclusion of the debate he will recognize the importance of this legislation to thousands of veterans that he will also recognize the sincerity of the speeches made by those who represent the views of countless Legion members and veterans across Canada, and acknowledge that there is still widespread support for the continuation of the legislation. It is also my hope that the minister will not only extend the expiry date of the act but provide a vehicle for meaningful amendments which will correct existing injustices.

● (2020)

Personally I have not had the privilege of serving in the armed forces, but I have had the opportunity in my constituency of Lambton-Kent of having a warm relationship with the Canadian Legion, particularly in my home town of Wallaceburg where I was installed as an honorary member of their branch. I am proud of their traditions and the innumerable contributions they have made to the community.

Whether by accident or design, it is particularly fitting that this debate is taking place just prior to Remembrance Day. It is important to recall the purpose and meaning of that day when we pay tribute to those who made the supreme sacrifice in the name of freedom, when we extend our sympathy to the families and friends whose loss of loved ones has left permanent scars, and when we remember with pride the members of the Legion for the sacri-

fices they made, the traditions they hold and, above all, their loyalty to our country.

As parliamentarians, our words, acts and deeds must transcend this important day, and it is our responsibility in this chamber to translate not only our gratitude but that of the Canadian people into tangible results defending the rights of our veterans. I would say to the minister, indeed to all members in the House, that a generous response on the part of the government to this important matter would have significantly more value and meaning than all the words spoken by hon. members on Remembrance Day.

During the debate on the Veterans' Land Act on March 28, 1974, and again in his statement today, the minister—and I say this with all respect—attempted to defend his position by developing in some detail the original intent of the legislation. As reported at page 948 of *Hansard* for March 28, 1974, the minister said:

I should like to remind hon. members that the original purpose of the Veterans' Land Act was to assist in the rehabilitation of veterans in the postwar period, following wartime active service, and to do so by helping them to settle on the land in rural or semi-rural areas as full or part-time farmers.

The intent of the legislation in these respects was clearly spelled out in the preamble to the act, and I think it is relevant to quote the following parts of the preamble:

"Whereas many men now serving in the active forces of Canada have recorded their desire to settle on land or engage in farming when hostilities cease, and it is desirable that suitably qualified veterans be encouraged to seek rehabilitation in the agricultural industry;

"And whereas part-time farming coupled with other employment is an increasingly important aspect of rural and semi-rural life in Canada;

"And whereas it is in the public interest as a measure of rehabilitation to assist in acquiring the ownership of farm homes—"

I emphasize the word "homes".

"—by qualified veterans—".

This in fact is the crux of the debate in this chamber today, and resolution of this problem is essential if additional, meaningful amendments are to be forthcoming and, may I add, should be forthcoming.

I will admit that the minister is accurate in a legal sense in presenting this view, and I am certain that all members are well aware of the original intention of the bill. Approximately 30 years have passed since the introduction of the legislation, and social and economic pressures have diluted the original concept with its emphasis on a home in a rural or semi-rural setting. However, I must emphasize that the desire and need for the establishment of a home are as relevant today as they were 30 years ago.

Who was able to predict with accuracy the rush to urbanization? Who sensed the great threat to our rich agricultural lands and the necessity for planning to preserve this valuable resource? Who predicted the unrealistic cost of lots and homes, and the unrealistic legislation that presently exists to meet these needs?

The principle of homes for our veterans is as valid today as when the legislation was first introduced. Indeed the problem is more critical today in that large numbers of veterans are experiencing difficulties in finding a place to live during their retirement.