

Veterans Affairs

I would like to read into the record a few excerpts from some of the letters that I have received from various branches of the Royal Canadian Legion. The following is an excerpt from a letter received from G. L. Marr, secretary of branch No. 484, Royal Canadian Legion, Mallorytown, Ontario. This letter reads in part:

The Mallorytown branch is most perturbed at the proposed move of the Veterans Affairs Department to Prince Edward Island. It is understood that only a small portion of the present staff have agreed to such a move. This can only lead to reduced efficiency in a department which has obvious room for improvement as it stands now.

Next is a letter signed by Louis Mitchell, president of branch No. 231 of the Royal Canadian Legion, known as the Rideau Lakes branch. I quote:

Since outstanding claims are taking far too long in Ottawa, why the move to Charlottetown where it is admitted it will take even longer?

Further on in the same letter, Mr. Mitchell says:

Since government is seeking ways to curtail spending and save money by any means possible, what does the move to Charlottetown do for the economy?

Then Mr. Mitchell says this:

Veterans are all reaching the age where their needs will flood the department. In view of this, what preparations are being made to handle this?

Here is further quotation from the president and secretary of the Royal Canadian Legion in Delta, Ontario, namely, Mr. Harry Vollick and Mr. Peter Bredyk, who say:

We seek your assistance in having the proposed move of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and more particularly the Canadian Pension Commission, to Prince Edward Island, cancelled in the best interests of veterans.

Legion branch No. 96, in my home city of Brockville, expressed it this way in a letter from Henry Elliott, president:

The Brockville branch No. 96... with 1,082 members we have by unanimous consent at a general meeting directed the writer to register opposition to the proposed move of the Department of Veterans Affairs and more particularly the Canadian Pension Commission from Ottawa to Prince Edward Island.

One could go on at length, as I am sure every member could, and quote from letters which they have received. I have one final quotation which comes from a letter written by the dominion president of the Royal Canadian Legion. He says:

We are in sympathy with the plan to create jobs in Prince Edward Island but not at the expense of disabled war veterans.

Obviously the purpose of the Department of Veterans Affairs is to be of service to the veterans. If this is not being fully accomplished now, and it will only deteriorate by moving the department to Prince Edward Island, then other than for political reasons why should a move take place? This seems to be a case of nobody wants anything done, except the politicians.

It is reported, and I have no reason to believe that the figures are inaccurate, that the staff of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Ottawa is highly opposed to the move. It would uproot their lives and force them to emigrate to a far part of the country from homes in which, in many cases, individuals were born and lived for many years. It has been stated that not any more than 5 per cent of the present employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs are actually willing to move.

By releasing the papers and documents that I have requested, perhaps we could find out how the government feels the move would benefit Prince Edward Island itself. The government has trumpeted the supposed fact that it will benefit the economy of the island by adding another industry, so to speak. It is an unfortunate fact of life that the number of veterans is decreasing every year as time passes, from the time of the First and Second World Wars and the Korean war. Unless another war occurs, which we all hope and pray does not, there will simply be no veterans left. In short, we are giving Prince Edward Island a white elephant at the expense of \$30 million to \$40 million.

• (1710)

I think all MPs are in favour of a certain diversification of government services to various parts of the country, but not for political purposes, and certainly not by moving a department that will not be of a more permanent value to the area to which it is going.

Perhaps the making public of all the behind-the-scenes documents that exist would reveal the monstrously unnecessary expense. Already the Department of Veterans Affairs is well housed here in Ottawa, but nevertheless the government is prepared to move it to a far-away place and spend millions of dollars on the move and on construction work to build accommodation at that place.

The ridiculous situation exists that right across the street from the veterans affairs department here in Ottawa is the National Archives. They say they need more space, so the federal government is going to Hull and spending \$40 million on new buildings while at the same time vacating the DVA building here. It will be left empty when it moves to the province of Prince Edward Island. If this inane move goes through, surely the National Archives could enlarge by simply moving across Wellington Street. It would save the taxpayers a great deal of money.

It seems that the government continually indulges in the spending of money on schemes that create unneeded, brand-new buildings, leaves other buildings unoccupied, and in addition vacates many rented premises here in the city of Ottawa with long-term rents when the government is obligated to pay those rents for many years.

About the only certain thing concerning this move of DVA will be that the government will have to lease more telephone lines between here and Prince Edward Island. After all, there is a skeleton staff in the ministry here and nothing else. By making this move, I suppose Bell Canada will benefit; but that in itself would be a pretty foolish reason for the move.

I have heard this matter talked about by many members of this House privately in conversation. I think almost everybody has reservations, at least to some extent, about this situation, why it is being done and whether it should be carried on.

One of the excuses given by the government for not making public the various papers that I requested was that it would involve obtaining the permission of the government of Prince Edward Island. This may well be so in regard to some of the