

tage of the loan offer. Suitable land in favourable areas was just not available, hence the fact that 150,000 veterans who are certified eligible for loans have not yet applied. In order for these people to receive the benefits of this program, the application deadline of March 31, 1975, should be extended or lifted.

There is one further deadline that bears scrutiny. I am sure all the hon. members know the one to which I refer, which is the October, 1968, deadline for certification of eligibility. There are a number of reasons for this to be repeated, such as the number of misunderstandings that resulted from there being two deadlines in the legislation, and the lack of effective communication of the real meaning of this deadline to the veterans. All hon. members are well aware of the large number of veterans who have been denied benefits as a result of genuine, honest mistakes. A huge volume of mail has been received to that effect by all of us. These people are another group who cannot be arbitrarily denied benefits, because, if each case could be tried on its own merits, each would certainly be judged deserving of those benefits. If this revision were made in conjunction with those aims already stated, I believe a far greater number of veterans of Canada's wars would be able to receive genuine and well deserved benefit from the Veterans' Land Act.

When considering these changes, I think it is very necessary to remember that we owe the existence of this institution, and a great many others in this great land of ours, to the actions and heroics of these people. Had these veterans been stingy in deciding what they would give up in defence of their country, we might not be here today with the right of decision that we now enjoy. All members of the House should support this motion, I submit.

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, at first glance the motion before the House might be considered routine. On inspecting it closely, however, one finds that it involves veterans. It seems to have become common practice since early 1973 for the opposition to divide the House on party lines on matters relating to veterans. I served on the veterans affairs committee in the last parliament, and I serve on it in this parliament. I have so served since 1968. I can say sincerely that the committee has been almost completely non-partisan and has rarely divided. Usually, all members have worked together and discussed a matter until consensus has been reached. That is why I feel so uncomfortable about today's debate. In the last two years we have witnessed a partisan approach to the problems of veterans. Fewer members of this House are veterans as compared with the last two parliaments, when I believe about 25 per cent of the members were veterans.

An hon. Member: Are you a veteran?

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): An hon. member asks if I am a veteran. Let me refer him to the little red book, the Parliamentary Guide, and he will see whether or not I am a veteran. I have always been concerned about the welfare of veterans, and always will be. For that reason I support the minister in his endeavours.

Although fewer members now are veterans, we must not forget that the number of veteran members serving at

Veterans Affairs

present is considerably lower than the number serving in the first parliament after 1945. Nevertheless, the veterans affairs committee of the twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth parliaments was perhaps one of the busiest committees of the House of Commons. Naturally, all committees worked harder because the rules were changed and estimates of various departments were considered in committee, not in committee of the whole.

Mr. Alexander: But you are a navy man, Joe.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): Even so, the veterans affairs committee did a tremendous job. There was a tremendous spirit of co-operation among the parties and veterans' associations. That, essentially, was the spirit in which the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs worked, the committee on which many members of the opposition have been most active. As I said, the committee worked in a non-partisan way. Its efforts were bent to providing better pensions, better health services, better welfare services and more special assistance to veterans, rather than to partisan activities.

The idea of reviewing the terminal date of VLA is not new. It was extended in 1959 to 1962. In 1962 it was extended to 1968, and in 1965 it was extended from 1968 to 1974. In 1974 it was extended to 1975. I raise these points in order to reply to the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre (Mr. McKenzie) who was concerned about the Veterans' Land Act and suggested that the government is not doing as much as it might. I would remind hon. members that the Conservatives were in power in 1962, and if they had been as concerned then as they say they are today, they could have extended the act beyond 1968— to 1978 or 1980. There was no reason they could not have done so; they had the strongest government of any, with more than 200 members to support them. Now they are in opposition, they sing a different song.

● (1700)

The article which appeared in the *Globe and Mail* of March 13 was a good one. The author referred to this issue as a political sacred cow. I think he is right, and I believe hon. members on the other side are using it as such. This article should be read by anyone who has not yet done so. A lot of credit is given to the minister for the stand he has taken. Once again, members are being called upon to consider this act. We are proud of our Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) who has extended this legislation to March 31, 1975. He has always turned an understanding ear when requests have been made to him, regardless of political affiliation. He has always been most co-operative in trying to understand the veteran's point of view, because he himself is a veteran. We are proud of his wartime career. We are proud of his career as a farmer in his native province of Prince Edward Island. We are proud of his career as Minister of Agriculture in that province, and of the work he has done in this parliament for every one of its members and for every veteran in the country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): A year ago, the standing committee recommended that benefits to veterans who are incapacitated to the extent of 100 per cent be increased by