

*Veterans Affairs*

tions under the Veterans' Land Act as at present specified in that act. Many members debating this issue are, like me, veterans of World War II, the war which we believed would be the last major conflict. Perhaps that is a slim hope.

During the past few years, particularly the last year, motions have been introduced to disregard or extend the deadline for applications under the Veterans' Land Act. Such motions are understandable, as they ask the government to give continued benefits to men and women who responded to their country's need in time of war. Such motions were considered carefully last year and turned down. However, the minister agreed to reconsider the matter. Finally, the official opposition brought in a motion of non-confidence. No one needs to tell me that that motion was not used as a political lever in an attempt to bring about the collapse of the government.

The minister had taken pains to make sure that every veteran who really wanted to, could avail himself of the provisions of the act. He was supported by the Royal Canadian Legion and other veterans' organizations in his decision. The official opposition said it had no wish to unseat the government; it moved its motion out of a desire to help veterans. Madam Speaker, I think they were speaking with tongue in cheek.

Also, the then NDP leader protested that the question of political advantage did not enter the minds of his party. He hoped the veterans would realize that the Progressive Conservatives were ready to play politics with the welfare of the veterans.

**Mr. Marshall:** We will remember that.

**Mr. Railton:** Personally I would have had a difficult time supporting the government if the minister had not reconsidered this matter. Why do I say this? When I was a certain age—it is close to the average of World War II veterans—I, myself, had taken out a VLA loan to help me buy some land and a house on the shores of Lake Erie. Indeed, at the time this matter was last discussed in the previous parliament, I did not wish to prevent any veteran from doing exactly what I had done. But my soul searching ended when the minister promised to reconsider the termination date for applications. So we, on all sides of the House, were able to vote for the motion with a clear conscience.

Since then I have had many inquiries from friends and constituents who are World War II veterans. I find that no one is very likely to be injured by closing off applications at the end of March, 1975. This gives me a personal freedom in not supporting the motion.

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When one reads the preamble to the original act there can, I think, be no doubt that the government of the day wished to favour those young Canadians who flocked to the colours voluntarily and defended their country so gloriously. It can be seen from the preamble that the government wished not only to reward returning veterans after the second world war but also to create some incentive which would encourage young people to leave their jobs and join the forces.

[Mr. Railton.]

At this stage we know there are some 100,000 veterans who have bought property with the help of VLA. Almost half of these, about 48,500, are still living on those properties and are repaying their loans. Another 40,000 of those still on their land have finished paying their debts.

When one considers that although the average age of those returning from the war was 24 and that the average age of veterans is now between 55 and 60, we realize that these citizens have thus had 30 years to consider land purchase under the Veterans' Land Act. In my many years of practice in Welland since the war, I find that a great many of the veterans there are 60 years of age or more. Thus, Mr. Speaker, I doubt very much whether there are more than a very few veterans who will even consider using the VLA to assist them in buying a home. Though it is true the cost of land and housing is very high today, and a grant would certainly be of some help, other borrowing possibilities would need to be open to the average veteran.

The mover and seconder of the motion before us are well known for their compassion toward veterans. Indeed, I believe that any speaker in this debate must be described in the same way, as being compassionate. However, when I got over my personal hurdle last year and satisfied myself that the act was no longer needed for its original purpose I found myself against extending the expiry date, being satisfied that none of our honoured veterans is likely to be hurt if the date now set for expiry remains unaltered.

I have listened carefully to the speeches of hon. members opposite and can find no new point in them. The present extension was made in a minority parliament and there were, therefore, some special considerations which had to be taken into account. These no longer apply. Needless expense should be eliminated in these times of inflation and of a national situation which is so serious, and so the act should be allowed to expire. This would still permit some new commitments to be made in favour of eligible veterans in the next few months.

We belong to a group composed of only a very few countries which operate a Department of Veterans Affairs. Our departmental budget this year is around \$600 million. This is evidence of our deep concern for Canadian veterans, even if nothing else is mentioned. In addition, we have today reported Bill C-4 to increase war veterans allowances in a very generous manner. It is possible that some method for the preferential treatment of veterans seeking to build or purchase homes can be worked out. I would support a new act to allow war pensioners and recipients of WVA to be helped in this manner.

Indeed it would be very nice if all veterans could qualify for some help under the National Housing Act. I do not know how this can be worked out; it would be up to the minister and the cabinet. In the meantime I should like to congratulate the minister on his compassion and also on his wisdom in the handling of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Mr. J. R. Holmes (Lambton-Kent):** Madam Speaker, it is with considerable pride that I participate in this debate. May I begin by congratulating the hon. member for Humbler-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) on the contributions they have made to this debate, as well as on