

*Private Members' Business*

about \$20 million from the Government of Canada every year. That is from, of course, the taxpayers of Canada.

It is a real recognition of what they have done. These benefits are indexed benefits, indexed to the rate of inflation. They are also tax free and deservedly so. We will not argue whether it is enough or not. I guess enough is never enough when we come to repaying those service people, war veterans and merchant seamen for what they have done for us. Mr. Speaker, I guess my time has elapsed. Could I have unanimous consent to continue?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** It is agreed for just a couple of minutes.

**Mr. Thompson:** I appreciate that very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a generosity that is very seldom extended in the House, and I very much appreciate it.

In addition to that \$20 million, I want to identify some of the areas in which that is spent. It is spent in terms of income support health care. We provide a number of services. One of them is health care benefits not covered by provincial governments. That includes such things as eye glasses, prescription drugs, dental care, hearing aids and chronic care and community beds.

One of the things, and very rightly so, brought up by the member that is not covered is the availability of extra-military to these people in regard to civilian access to departmental or contract bids throughout the nation which is, of course, available to those designated as veterans. That designation as veteran is the area in which we will end this debate today, given your consideration.

We do not officially recognize merchant seamen as veterans. Some countries do. For example, the United Kingdom recognizes its merchant seamen as veterans.

This is a very important point for all of us to recognize. They recognize them as veterans but do not give them the same kind of income support as we do here in Canada.

In a sense the question becomes one of definition. It is fine to be designated as a veteran but it is another thing to receive the programs and support that you need.

I will quote from a Royal Canadian Legion submission to the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs which sums it up much better than you or I. It simply states: "The name veteran without access to the benefits is very little comfort indeed". It says it is cold comfort indeed.

We do not recognize them officially as veterans but we do have support programs for them and their families, their dependents, which may not go far enough. However the government certainly recognizes the great service the merchant seamen performed for this country during a time of war and will continue to recognize them in the manner that we do.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** The time provided for consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired.

Pursuant to Standing Order 96(1) the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

Even though this item is dropped from the Order Paper I will nevertheless give my ruling on the procedural acceptability of this bill at a later time, for the hon. member for Regina—Lumsden.

This House stands adjourned until Monday next at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

The House adjourned at 4.41 p.m.