

Oral Questions

died in combat, one of the highest casualty rates of any allied service during the war.

Both the United States and United Kingdom recognize their merchant seamen as veterans. Canadian merchant seamen who served in dangerous waters during the last great war seek today what they have sought since the end of the war, equal recognition, entitlement, and benefits now received by their fellow World War II veterans. This year, for the first time, the Royal Canadian Legion supports that position. These men were awarded all the World War II decorations. If that does not make them veterans, I do not know what does.

Will the minister today give his assurance that he will either amend Bill C-87 today, or bring in additional legislation immediately that will give these merchant seamen, who served in Canada's merchant navy during World War II, veteran status?

Hon. Gerald S. Merrithew (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, this government and governments for the last 45 years have dealt with this particular problem. We recognize with great sincerity the contribution that was made by the merchant marine during the time of war. It is for that very reason we have put in place all the programs we have for the merchant marine.

Essentially, they do get the military decorations, but they do not get the CVSM, the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, for example and they do not get the Defence Medal.

Second, we do give them disability pensions and we do give them prisoner-of-war compensation. They do not get War Veterans Allowance, but they do get civilian war allowance. There are lots of things that they do get. We have treated them very, very well, it seems to me. The problem is they were not part of the Canadian Active Service Force in time of war.

However, I want to tell the hon. member that we have the matter under consideration. It will be discussed at a meeting of all the veterans' groups, not just with the Royal Canadian Legion. There others as well. We set that up as a topic for discussion on October 24. It will be discussed over the period of the next few months.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Lyle Dean MacWilliam (Okanagan—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, who I understand is away on business, I will direct my question to the Minister for International Trade. The minister, I understand, has been notified of the question which concerns the Fraser River Estuary Management Program funded by both the federal government and the B.C. government.

Over the past five years that program has been mandated to monitor and assess the environmental health of the lower Fraser River. The five-year funding is now essentially grinding to a halt and the management committee of the program has applied to the government for a three-year extension.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is the only one of three federal agencies not yet committed to the continuation of the program funding. Is the Department prepared to commit at this time the funding needed to continue the program? Alternatively, would the minister be prepared to bring these matters before the next cabinet meeting and encourage his cabinet colleagues to consider this important environmental initiative?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the interest of the government and the success of its programs with reference to salmon enhancement is well illustrated by the fact that this was one of the greatest years for the salmon fishery in British Columbia this century.

An hon. member: Are you taking the credit for the salmon run?

Mr. Crosbie: Yes, we are taking the credit for that. It is time, Mr. Speaker, that the government cast aside its modesty and started taking credit for a great many of the things that it has done.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Crosbie: With respect to the clean-up and sustainable development of the Fraser River Estuary, that is a high priority with the government. The Minister of the Environment will be outlining the details of his Green Plan in the next few weeks. The hon. member can be assured that the Fraser River will have a central part in this great environmental Green Plan which acts. While all the opposition does is talk, this government acts, Mr. Speaker.