

I would also like to comment on the lot restrictions contained in the act. Half an acre is required if one is to qualify. This, in some instances, I understand can be reduced by about 20 per cent. Madam Speaker, we must face the fact that they just do not make lots of half an acre any more, and if a veteran were lucky enough to find one, \$18,000 would be completely consumed in the purchase of the lot. He would not really be much further ahead in obtaining the home he seeks. For a veteran even to think of moving into the agricultural field with that minimum amount of assistance would mean, I am afraid, his being laughed right out of the community.

As the minister has said before and as, I too believe, we must look at the matter in complete perspective. First of all the Veteran's Land Act was not designed, even in the beginning, to be a program of urban housing, nor as a part of a retirement program for persons reaching the end of their careers. The basic purpose was to provide loans for the purchase of agricultural land, to be used either on a full or on a part-time farming basis by veterans who were interested in that form of rehabilitation program on their return to civilian life, following wartime active service duties.

Another important aspect which I feel we are failing to grasp is that the Veterans' Land Act was part of a triumvirate, or three-pronged attack on veterans' problems at that time. Now that the two other phases have been curtailed for some years, it is the only remaining program. This, I believe, should be dissolved and a better, more up-to-date approach found to the problems of providing adequate housing, if we want to be specific, for our veterans. The two others, of course, were the university training program under the Veterans Rehabilitation Act and the re-establishment of credits under the War Measures Grants Act. The benefits of all three programs were alternative one to the other.

That meant that each veteran had the right to choose whichever plan he considered would best serve his needs and desires. The university training program was concluded in the 1950s, and October 31, 1968, was the final date for veterans to re-establish credit benefits. With this in mind I made it a point in the past few days to contact many Legion branches in my area. A member of the opposition talked about seven Legion branches in his area. In my area we have 17.

**An hon. Member:** Send a copy of your speech to all of them.

**Mr. Douglas (Bruce):** I intend to, if you will send your branches copies of your speech. I was able to contact 14 of 17 branches in the Bruce-Grey area. Without exception the members told me that, as far as they are concerned, the Veterans' Land Act should be phased out and a new plan, which will fit the needs of veterans, brought in.

**An hon. Member:** Where is it?

**Mr. Douglas (Bruce):** I think, if you will give us a little more than 15 days, the minister will come up with an idea.

**An hon. Member:** Which minister?

#### *Veterans Affairs*

**Mr. Douglas (Bruce):** Why, the very capable Minister of Veterans Affairs.

**Mr. MacDonald (Cardigan):** How about that!

**Mr. Douglas (Bruce):** I concluded, from talking to Legion members in my area, that something better than the present VLA act is needed if we are to give the veterans of this country what they so richly deserve.

I would also agree that most of the veterans today who have credits under the Veterans' Land Act are in the position of considering retirement property and housing benefits. I am led to believe that a study is currently under way involving officials of Central Mortgage and Housing and the Department of Veterans Affairs to see if they can establish a much better program to replace the act, one with a new housing assistance program that would fit more aptly the current needs of such veterans who have been holding their Veterans' Land Act credits for the purchase of retirement property and retirement venture capital. We must look at this area seriously. This has been under discussion in one form or another for the past nine years, since the orderly phasing out of Veterans' Land Act lending operation was first proposed.

As of March this year, more than \$1.25 billion of public funds had been allotted to veterans under the Veterans' Land Act, and over 140,000 veterans have taken advantage of the program. This is an indication that the initial concept of the legislation has now been fulfilled; and just as people who have served their country and their society well are given an honourable discharge and allowed to retire with dignity, so I believe the Veterans' Land Act can now be given just such an honourable discharge and allowed to retire with dignity, only to make way for more comprehensive and better legislation, made possible through the co-operation of both the Department of Veterans Affairs and Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

This should be legislation which will provide our veterans, who wish to use it, with reasonable and proper retirement housing or retirement property, so that they can complete their time among us in a dignified and honourable manner, a manner fitting to the great debt that we owe them for their sacrifice and courage in our country's most desperate hour of need.

I for one would certainly back any proposal which gives the veterans a better deal in housing, in opportunity, in medical care, and in the care of their families and dependants. I believe that much more can be done to provide assistance for many veterans who now are reaching retirement age. I want to see their pensions improved; I want to see some of the fringe benefits made available to them that they so richly deserve.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I must at this time go against the proposal that the Veterans' Land Act be continued in its present form, or for that matter in any form. I submit that the act should be allowed to expire on March 31, 1975, and that a much better and more varied program should be introduced by the Department of Veterans Affairs, one which will provide the veterans of Canada with the land, housing and retirement benefits they so richly deserve and have earned.