

*Veterans Allowance Increases*

shall). His constituency does not quickly come to mind but I heard the hon. gentleman's speech and I will remember it for a long time.

When you recognized me, Mr. Speaker you referred to me as the hon. member for Victoria. In Victoria, we have many veterans who are disabled and many of their dependents, and the next of kin of deceased veterans. I think Victoria, in particular, has a reputation for being a city which did not spare its sons to defend what it thought was just cause, whether it was in the Boer War, in World War I and World War II or in the Korean War. Speaking personally, in my little class at school in Victoria, of the 13 pupils 12 were veterans of the second world war and the thirteenth could not be a veteran because he was serving in the U.S. merchant marine.

● (5:20 p.m.)

When we speak of veterans pensions—and this is one of the few points that has not been brought up so far in this debate to my knowledge—many people think that all veterans receive pensions. We all know that this is not the case. We are speaking here today not of everyone who has served this country but of a special few, and of the survivors of those special few. I enjoy my work on the Veterans Affairs Committee because we help each other to help others, and surely that is what Parliament is all about. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that veterans in good health in this House and in the various veterans organizations, of which there are 11 across the country, are not trying to help themselves. We are trying to help others: the disabled, the next of kin of our war dead, and the so-called burnt-out veterans who cannot make their way in this competitive and complicated world. These are the people we are trying to help. We all do it in our own way.

I look around me and I see many of the hon. members who have already spoken on this and on the other side of the House who have helped out in special ways. The hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. MacRae) spoke about the Hong Kong veterans. A great number of us put in reports and recommendations to the Woods committee when it was conducting its hearings. I put forward a series of recommendations at that time, and now I would like to put in a special plug for the benefit of doubt clause to which reference has been made by the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. Winch) who just preceded me. I feel very strongly about this. I am speaking about the benefit of doubt as it relates in particular to veterans who served overseas, because as you, Mr. Speaker, know and as every other veteran knows, veterans who have served overseas have often been denied the benefit of doubt because they have no proper medical documentation. Every veteran here will agree with me when I say that the best documented veteran is the soldier, the sailor or the airman who stayed behind in Canada. Naturally, he has the best documents because he did not have a chance to lose them anywhere. So, as I say, I would like to put in this plug for the overseas veteran who is suffering as a result of the so-called benefit of doubt clause, and I hope it is removed soon, the sooner the better.

[Mr. Groos.]

The other day when I was at the Calgary airport I saw the now elderly and somewhat tattered Lancaster aircraft mounted outside the airport as a monument to the past. For me it was a poignant sight and it set me to thinking of our war dead, of our veterans, and of our efforts on their behalf. When I say "our efforts" I am thinking not only of the House of Commons and its Veterans Affairs Committee but also of the various veterans organizations and groups which have appeared from time to time before our committee to put forward their ideas and to give us the benefit of their advice. I had an opportunity to work closely at one time—and I am happy to say we were rewarded with some success a few years ago—with one of these groups. I am referring to the Hong Kong veterans. I will not say any more about their plight because I think much has already been said on this subject, but certainly we must not stop in our efforts to help them until every last one of them receives the minimum 48 per cent disability pension which will give protection of some sort to their wives and families.

Looking at this aircraft on the pedestal outside Calgary against the backdrop of events in Canada today, I wondered what had happened to our sense of values. We may personally and individually place the welfare of our veterans and their dependents or their next of kin high on our own scale of priorities, but this sense of values of which I speak, and its high place in our personal scale, must be reflected and incorporated in the legislation passed in this House. I can find no fault with the motion brought before the House by the hon. member for Humboldt-St. George's-St. Barbe, and I urge the government to take speedy action to bring about a sizeable increase in both the range and the scale of benefits available to veterans and their survivors. I ask the government to go beyond the point of restoring the purchasing power of the former pensions and allowances. To my mind, those pensions and allowances were far too low, and I ask the government to remember that.

● (5:30 p.m.)

Finally, I ask the government to remember that when we enter into wars we have to realize that there is always a price to pay and it takes a long time to pay because it is a price in blood and a price in money. We are asking the government today to see to it that the nation does its duty by paying money. This is the least expensive and easiest form of payment. We should not have to wait much longer. Judging by the tone of this debate so far and by my experience with other veterans legislation that has been introduced by the government in this House, any legislation that they may care to introduce to alleviate the situation described here so eloquently today by other hon. members would, I am sure, pass very quickly. I am equally sure hon. members would delay not one whit any other government business that the government may wish to bring before the House. So my final plea, Mr. Speaker, is through you to the minister and the government to let us now get on with our job.