

*Proceedings on Adjournment Motion*

new devices business than are being laid off in the tube business. Unfortunately, this is not taking place in the same area. I am sad to say that. Being a connoisseur of communications, my hon. friend will know very well that changes are taking place very rapidly in this field. If a company does not move with the new technology possibly because it is moving in other areas of technology, it is bound to be replaced by some other company which does.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard):** Order. The hon. member for Palliser (Mr. Schumacher).

VETERANS AFFAIRS—EFFECT OF CLOSING OF  
VETERANS LAND ACT OFFICES OUTSIDE  
BIG CITIES

**Mr. Stan Schumacher (Palliser):** Mr. Speaker, first of all I should like to compliment the ministers involved for being in the House this evening. It is very refreshing to see this attention to our problems on the late show. I hope it will continue. On January 27 I addressed the following question to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) as recorded at page 2868 of *Hansard*:

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Veterans Affairs. It deals with the decision to close full-time offices of the Veterans Land Act administration branch which have been helping veterans in the field outside the big cities. Does closing the full-time VLA office at Drumheller, Alberta and the drastic reduction of services there represent a decision by the minister to reduce the amount of help that the government is giving veterans generally across the country?

I might say that when the question was transferred to this time slot I wrote the minister to express dissatisfaction with this unnecessary and retrograde step relating to Canada's commitment to her veterans. The minister kindly replied to my letter, but with respect I do not feel he met the problem raised by my question. In speaking on this question I am not merely concerned with the veterans of a large portion of my constituency but with the welfare of veterans all across the country, because as I understand it the closure of the VLA office in Drumheller is not an isolated example but merely another example of this government's implementation of what it conceives to be the just society.

What we see happening here is the application of the theories of the Postmaster General (Mr. Kierans) to the Department of Veterans Affairs—reduced costs by reduced service. Because the veterans who use the facilities of the VLA are what they are, namely, responsi-

ble persons who have demonstrated a keen sense of duty, they will probably survive the reduction in service. What is particularly galling to them is that the saving created at their expense is not passed on to the taxpayer but is diverted by the government to other budgets.

It is diverted to the budget of the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion. According to releases by his department, almost 65 per cent of the grants made to date have been to businesses operating in the province of Quebec. Then there is the example of the Department of Agriculture which has shifted the bulk of its dairy support program to the dairy industry in Quebec. It seems apparent, also, that this so-called economy drive, which is really misnamed when one considers that it has not resulted in any over-all reductions in government spending, is wrongly directed. After all, the VLA was set up to aid farmer veterans, not urbanites. In this situation I would appreciate the minister explaining why the field office network is being weakened instead of the regional or central offices. For example, if there had to be a staff reduction, why was it not carried out at Calgary or Edmonton, or right here in Ottawa rather than in the field where the job has to be done?

• (10:10 p.m.)

**Hon. Jean-Eudes Dubé (Minister of Veterans Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member said, he wrote to me with reference to Drumheller and I replied to his letter. However, this evening he enlarged his comments to apply not only to his constituency but to the country as a whole. First of all, perhaps I should state that the director of the Veterans Land Act has been reviewing his organization from year to year, most particularly in the area represented by the hon. member. This is not done solely because of the government's fight against inflation, as suggested by the hon. member, but mostly because of a decline in the work load.

During the year 1968-69 only 16 loans, with an approximate value of \$252,000, were made to veterans in the Drumheller field area. The main bulk of the business originates in the northern segment of this field area, a distance of 20 to 25 miles from one of our VLA field officers who is located at Stettler.

The hon. member also suggested that the reductions were confined solely to our field areas. This is not the case. I can assure the House that staff reductions were effected at all levels of the veterans land administration.