

When the scribe writes that last word, that last line, when he puts in that last comma, that last dot, we can rest assured he will say, "They did not forget". We are certain that they, our comrades, would have been much like us, charged with responsibility.

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, in rising to take part in this debate I wish to commend the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) and the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) for having introduced the motion presently before the House, and to associate myself with their eloquent and passionate pleas to the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. MacDonald) to review the terminal date March 31, 1975, of the Veterans' Land Act.

While the injustice of the phasing out of this act has been of concern to many members in this House and while we have tried to impress that concern on an intractable government, I want to express my admiration for the work done by one member of this House in particular—the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe. He has devoted time and effort to keeping this issue in the arena of public awareness. As a result of his article in newspapers across the country, branches of the Canadian Legion, veterans' organizations and members of our armed forces have stepped up their representations to individual members of parliament to reiterate how the phasing out of the act will adversely affect them.

Equally important, Madam Speaker, is the adverse effect that this breach of faith, this breaking of a commitment will have on our system of government. When government, any government, fails to honor its commitments, then the credibility of the whole system suffers. It is ironic to think that those who fought and sacrificed to safeguard and protect our democratic institutions, our system of responsible government, should now be betrayed by it.

I listened to the speeches of the mover and seconder of this motion, Madam Speaker, and I listened with anticipation to the words of the minister to see if he would respond in the same generous humane way as the two hon. members who preceded him. And while I have great respect for the minister for much of the work he is doing, his statement yesterday afternoon came as a great disappointment. His flat refusal even to review the terminal date of the act was surprising and discouraging, particularly in view of his remarks that he was considering another housing program for veterans. If such is the case will the minister not consider an extension of the act at least until such time as the new housing program for veterans is operational?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, we all know that the gestation period for any piece of legislation is uncertain, and there certainly was no indication by the minister that any new housing program for veterans would have a high priority on the government's list of legislation. In fact, we were not even told if the proposed program is yet off the drawing board.

Veterans Affairs

In view of the absence of detail about a new housing and land program for veterans, surely it is not asking too much of the minister to extend the current legislation until something better, something more in line with contemporary costs and needs, can replace it. Is there to be an interregnum between the two programs? And, if so, who is to say who and how many veterans will be reinstated? Are our veterans to be left waiting in limbo while a suitable program—and one might ask, suitable to whom—is developed?

Will it be suited to the costs of housing in various parts of the country? Will it take into consideration the fact that the present \$18,000 limit for a lot and a house is a ludicrous figure in this day and age? Will it acknowledge that \$18,000 would hardly pay for the lot, let alone the home?

● (1640)

Will it recognize that the present one-half acre stipulation in the act has restrictions both for those wishing to locate on farm land in the country where such acreage is inadequate, and in a suburban area where it is too large? Will it be available to those who were eliminated from the benefits of the current act by the arbitrary imposition of the 1968 deadline governing the issuance of certificates? Will any of these things apply in the proposed new legislation?

The extension of the Veterans' Land Act would allow time to rectify these inequities or to bring in a new housing program, one that could be applied in terms of today's housing market, housing prices and housing construction. It would allow time for many people still in the service, who will retire to parts of the country other than where they are presently located, to work out suitable retirement plans. Even if they could do the improbable and meet the conditions of the present act, why should they rush to purchase a house just to beat the deadline of the March, 1975, expiry date?

At a time when the morale of our armed forces is low, and when that morale has suffered further blows in recent weeks with announcements of restraint and restriction, the situation surely should not be further aggravated by the news that the government will not retreat from its intention to phase out the Veterans' Land Act.

There are many veterans, Madam Speaker, and many active service personnel in Kingston and the Islands, the constituency I represent. Kingston has a history of 300 years of military involvement. Its citizens are serving Canada in many centres in this country and abroad, and those who remain behind are concerned—concerned about what the government proposes to do with this act, and concerned about who is to come within its terms. They want to be certain that those who should be able to avail themselves of the benefits of the act will have the opportunity to do so. But we are speaking of more than money, or terms, or rewards. We are speaking of faith, or breach of it; of trust, or lack of it; of honoring commitments, or breaking them.

On March 12, 1974, as recorded at page 434 of *Hansard*, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, during the debate on the Veterans' Land Act, said:

It has been made abundantly clear on many occasions that the federal government does intend to live up to the commitment it made to those