

Supply

I believe the Hon. Member was referring to the estimating of costs. In their estimates the voluntary agencies felt that in fact for the first two to three years the Government would actually benefit, just as we have seen it happen with the political tax credit where it has taken a number of years for people to begin to make those changes. This is, of course, in relation to the removal of the \$100 standard deduction from which the Government would actually benefit for the first two or three years.

While there are some risks involved in moving into a new system, the question is whether more self-reliance can be encouraged through the strengthening of these groups. For example, let us consider the cost to Government of producing training and retraining programs. The Ross report, which was commissioned by the Secretary of State, indicates that the cost of training and retraining in the voluntary sector is approximately one-third the cost of training under government programs. If we are looking at the outlay from the public purse for youth programs, training and retraining programs, there is a cost effectiveness built right into the system. There is a large amount of public funds for training being channelled into special targeted areas encompassing an entire network of groups. For example, the YMCA and the YWCA have been training youth for years. I believe that allowing them to take the risk of obtaining more corporate and private donations through some incentives in this area must surely be, in the long run, cost effective in terms of the public purse and in terms of the stability of our country.

Mr. Pepin: Mr. Speaker, my question does not concern the core of the remarks made by the Hon. Member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean) but is a side consideration. At one point in his remarks he compared the role of a Member of Parliament to that of a voluntary worker. I was intrigued by that comparison because I always thought that Members come here because they are forced to do so by their electorates and not on a voluntary basis! I was also intrigued because I thought that when Members who come here do not behave like professionals, they are punished by being relieved of their income, which is not a characteristic of voluntary work. While recognizing the attractiveness of the comparison, I ask the Hon. Member if he would care to expand on it.

Mr. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I believe my comments were related to political Parties and to the role of Parliament as being an extension of the political Party process, which is a voluntary activity. When we examine our Canadian citizenship and the exercise of Parliament and elections, they are dependent upon the participation of Canadians in the process. Behind each Member in the House there are people who will give of themselves to their country as an expression of their citizenship.

Hon. Serge Joyal (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, first, I would certainly like to thank the Hon. Member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean) for raising this important issue today. I think it is of interest not only to Members of Parliament sitting in the House but in fact to all Canadians.

Canada is experiencing a transition in its economy and social structure, whose signs surround us. Some segments of our population find themselves disadvantaged by the current combination of transient factors and must take action to make known their needs, views and possible contributions to society.

Women, youth, the handicapped, the ethnic and language groups, the elderly and natives, all have their particular problems when each seeks, in the concept of Canada, a welcoming reflection of themselves.

It has been a Canadian ideal to accept and respect differences while providing all with equitable access to the social, economic and political institutions and systems of Canada. Although the current economic and social realities put strains on this ideal, I believe we will be able to overcome them and mutually accommodate each other, adapt and move forward together.

The Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations is to be congratulated, especially today when it is having a conference in Ottawa at this very moment that we are debating the issue of voluntary sectors in Canada, in its continuing efforts to bring representatives from all sectors together in order to better understand voluntary action, to exchange ideas and stimulate the thinking on future possibilities for voluntary groups and voluntary action. It is that kind of discussion which I appreciate as it can make an essential contribution to the evaluation of progress on voluntary action and the identification of emerging issues and solutions for consideration.

● (1140)

The Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations in fact, has come into its own as a national voluntary organization helping us all to focus more clearly on certain issues. It is with great pride that the Department of the Secretary of State of Canada, since 1975, since the inception of the coalition, has contributed largely to its annual financing. In fact, more than two-thirds of the annual budget of the coalition is provided through a contribution of the Department of the Secretary of State of Canada. The meeting of the coalition at this very moment in Ottawa is financed through contribution of this Department.

This is the fifth major conference of this type organized by the coalition since its inception in 1975. Along with other national voluntary organizations, the coalition has constantly stressed the importance of voluntary action in a variety of formats, including more recently presentations to the Macdonald Commission, as the Hon. Member referred to previously.

As Secretary of State and the lead Minister for voluntary action, I can appreciate the importance of these efforts. Voluntary action is central to my mandate in two ways. It is a means for various groups with which I deal to organize themselves and thus better communicate their views to the government and to the public. It is also a basic phenomenon of our democracy and an essential manifestation of citizenship.

Although I am partly preaching to the converted, Mr. Speaker, it is useful to recall the value of voluntary action if