

Private Members' Business

I want to make it clear that extending recognition to non-traditional relationships is not an attempt to undermine the family, but it is rather an effort to recognize today's realities and to end discrimination. Traditional families remain the majority and a fundamental building block of society. But we cannot ignore that there are different types of family units that exist today.

In response to a question put forward by the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve dealing with the Egan and Nesbit supreme court ruling and the extension of same sex benefits, the Minister of Justice expressed views before the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons to the following effect. When we talk about extending benefits we should be looking at relationships and dependency instead of exclusively sexual criteria to define those relationships. We should be thinking of a brother and sister living together, a son taking care of an elderly mother, a mother taking care of an adult daughter, and other types of relationships where adults depend on each other emotionally and financially. And there are many such cases in this complex society.

I think the Minister of Justice has put forward an interesting and innovative proposition, and I would be ready to support that position. However, I must stress that we have no immediate intention of introducing such legislation. We must engage in a full cost analysis and we must have a full debate in the House.

I want to add that the benefits we need to consider granting to partners in non-traditional relationships go beyond monetary ones. Even if the government has yet to put same sex relationships on an equal footing with more traditional ones, I firmly believe that measures should be taken to prevent incidents of discrimination in the workplace and we should be looking seriously at bereavement leave and family care leave to same sex partners.

Ironically, while we as elected officials are anxious to provide leadership on these issues, it is the courts and the private sector who are doing so, doing the right and courageous things by protecting the rights of all Canadians.

In its 1994 annual report the Canadian Human Rights Commission listed major private institutions offering such arrangements, firms such as BC-Tel, Hudson's Bay Company, Northern Telecom, Southam Publishing, Shell Canada, Levi Strauss, Toronto Sun Publishing Corporation, Dow Chemical, and the Toronto Dominion Bank. Canada Post entered into an agreement with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers that would provide same sex benefits for its 52,000 members.

I think the Human Rights Commissioner expressed it best when he said in reference to these corporations: "All of this should deliver a simple message. Institutions of this sort are not

wild-eyed reformers. They are not interested in endorsing certain lifestyles or debating the meaning of the word spouse. They are changing their practices to bring them into line with the intent of the charter, provincial law and a growing body of jurisprudence". And I might add, to bring them into consistency with reality.

As I conclude and I look at the clock, it may be 1805 to some members of the House, but on this side of the House it is 1995. Discrimination, bigotry, ignorance persist. One of my goals as an elected member of Parliament is to work toward ending all forms of discrimination. In that effort, I invite the help of my colleagues on both sides of the House. This is not an Ozzie and Harriet world, however much we might wish it would be. I look forward to working with hon. members on both sides of the House on these important issues.

Mr. Art Hanger (Calgary Northeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this, in my opinion, is the most important piece of private members' business presently before the House. There is no more pressing issue facing the House than in what direction we as parliamentarians want to take the morality of the country.

• (1805)

Our actions as parliamentarians have consequences. We must take extreme care not to subvert institutions that form the fabric of our society and way of life. This motion would do just that. That is why I am strongly, unreservedly, and unapologetically speaking against it. That is why, as an elected representative of the families of my riding, I will fight against any move by this or any government to subvert or undermine traditional family values. The family is the very building block of our society, not individuals, because individuals alone cannot maintain and sustain our country, only families can. It is in this defence of the family, the most important and basic union of all, that I give this speech.

I am one of those not so rare people who believe that law is about morality. I believe it is impossible to separate law and morality. All laws are either based on or express a fundamental view of ordering of human relations. That, whether we like it or not, is morality.

I am also one of those people who believe that a liberal democratic society founded upon rights requires a certain kind of moral grounding if it hopes to function. Therefore, if you are like me and you accept these premises, then you must also accept the conclusion that government must not pass laws that threaten the morality upon which fundamental structures of our society are built. It is not only undemocratic, it is dangerous. Government must serve its citizens. It must respect and promote the morality that is the consensus of its citizens. It must not attack it. It must not threaten it. It must rarely seek to change it.