

Supply

“responsible and accountable”. It is not what he is describing and twisting, and I take objection to that description.

● (1600)

The Hon. Member knows we are talking about a balance, that much of the access he describes exists through the tax deduction system and Revenue Canada's extension of tax deduction numbers. We are both talking about expanding that program and how to extend additional aid into the private sector. I ask him to bear in mind that concept of the words “responsible and accountable”; it is an important one.

Mr. Epp: Mr. Speaker, I agree with both concepts. However, I want to put this in a very practical sense. The Hon. Member took almost his whole 20 minutes to describe various charitable organizations in his riding. He can use his time that way, but let me give you a very specific case; service to the mentally retarded of Canada. This was largely started by volunteer organizations, including Kinsmen or Kinettes, in my area of rural Manitoba in places like Steinbach, Beauséjour, and St. Malo. They are all voluntary, registered charities. They would like to expand their facilities, programs and service to people. But the only way they can expand is if they go back through the system, for instance with Canada Works student programs and so forth. While those programs are welcome, they then start running into the dependency factor. The Government says you cannot have programs one after another because you are becoming dependent on the Government. That is the catch 22 situation we have created. If they were able to raise certain funds which could be used as tax credits beyond what they are doing, then they could expand. I suggest, with all due respect to the Hon. Member, that they would be accountable for those funds every bit as much as the Government of Canada, and I suggest a lot more. They would also be responsible for those funds. Government, by its nature, likes to create dependency. I say leave them independent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would be prepared to recognize the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary, but I must inform the House that the time for questions and comments is over. Is there unanimous consent for a question from the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Evans: Mr. Speaker, I understand what the Hon. Member is saying, but I do not think he addressed the fundamental points I tried to put forward. I hope we can have a chance to discuss it further because I think they are very fundamental. Certainly they have been central to my thinking on this whole issue, and I have given this particular proposal a great deal of thought.

The other issue I would put to him is that when we start talking about the difference between charitable functions, doing good for society generally, and the tax deductibility of funds expended for that purpose by charitable organizations, and then move to the question of political advocacy, it seems to me we have crossed a very dangerous line. You then run the

very great risk of setting up an extra-parliamentary special interest lobby funded by all taxpayers, even though the issues and interests they may be promoting are very narrow and contrary to the broader public interest.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that in a democratic society legislatures are the institutions whereby the public makes its views known. Voluntary organizations can make their views known to the people and try and persuade them to influence their political representatives to make changes in policy. However, I do not think it is appropriate for charitable organizations funded through tax deductible moneys to be going directly to Members of Parliament and lobbying on behalf of narrow interests which are not and cannot be said to be in the broad public interest for which they received their charitable status.

Mr. Epp: Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that it is not a black and white issue. I think I said that. However, I prefer to err on the side of Canadians. Right now I have a petition in my office through which a number of churches across the country indicate that they will oppose Bill C-10, the Divorce Act. Surely that is legitimate, but it is also political activity. They want to influence the legislation. I do not see why that should give any cause for concern to the Government, yet it might cause them to lose their status as charities. I think we in this House are sometimes too careful. I know why the amendments in Bill C-169 concerning elections were brought forward.

Mr. Evans: Your Leader does not.

Mr. Epp: Let me finish. But I do not think the Canadian public and Parliament are well served by bringing in amendments which restrict the activity of groups who want to put their viewpoint forward during an election campaign. We in this House must always err on the side of freedom rather than follow what is so often the case in a parliamentary system, that of bringing in another regulation, another law to restrict the activities of Canadians. The vast majority of Canadians do not want to violate the natural and decent principles on which democracy is based; let us take a chance on them.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[Translation]

SUBJECT MATTER OF QUESTIONS TO BE DEBATED

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 45, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the Hon. Member for Edmonton North (Mr. Paproski) (a) Lotteries—Federal sports lottery. (b) Request for federal-provincial meeting; the Hon. Member for Kindersley-Lloydminster (Mr. McKnight)—Government advertizing (a) Rail expansion