

Private Members' Business

quences of this decision to help lessen discrimination against homosexual and lesbian partners.

A third finding is that the cost of eliminating discriminatory policies will be minimal.

The legal recognition of same sex spouses would not cost a fortune, contrary to what some people may have feared. Although there are no detailed actuarial studies on the additional cost of extending social benefits to same sex spouses, we can look at the experience of employers who have recognized such couples.

• (1755)

Several private companies, organizations, and governments asked actuarial firms to assess the cost of proposed measures intended for same sex spouses. The experts surveyed concluded that the additional costs would be minimal, in the order of 0.5 to 1.5 per cent depending on the various social benefits being considered. The argument that costs would be prohibitive is therefore not valid.

Fourth and last, the public would support the recognition of same sex spouses.

Finally, in discussing new social policy—and that is what we are dealing with today—we must assess how acceptable this new policy is to the public. This is essential to the success of the operation. Often, governments that tried to impose changes without first securing public support were quickly called to order.

I think that the public is ready now for the legal recognition of same sex spouses. In Quebec—we are always different—you would even find greater support than in Canada.

According to an Environics poll conducted in Ontario in the spring of 1994, fifty-five per cent of respondents were prepared to recognize entitlement to social benefits for same sex spouses. An Angus Reid poll showed similar results across Canada. In Quebec, 73 per cent of respondents to a SOM poll conducted in the fall of 1993 were in favour.

To conclude, the members of this House should support the motion put forward by my colleague because it is a matter of justice and equity. First and foremost, it is a matter of justice because all individuals in our society are equal. Being equal, they should not be subject to discrimination when they join with another person to form a couple.

Second, it is a matter of equity because homosexual couples are not given the same treatment as heterosexual couples, and the only difference between the two is sexual orientation. Parliament must therefore encourage the government to take the measures necessary to put an end to this discrimination against same sex couples.

In turn, this stand for justice and equity may well prompt the public to exhibit a more positive attitude in terms of respecting

differences, something we really need in our society if we want it to be a better place, with less violence and hatred.

This motion does not ask for the recognition of special rights, but for the enforcement of the right to equality. That is why I urge this House to vote for the motion put forward by my hon. colleague from Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

[English]

Mr. Barry Campbell (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion which calls on the government to take the necessary measures for the legal recognition of same sex spouses.

I commend my colleague from Hochelaga—Maisonneuve for his initiative in bringing up this issue; it is timely and exceedingly important.

Before I discuss my views on the question I state clearly and unequivocally I reject the suggestion this debate is blasphemy or that those who would promote equality are part of some conspiracy to kidnap our children.

In due course the government will have to address this issue. The precious moments of private members' business at the end of each day provide an opportunity for us to express our personal views, and I am pleased to do so.

I have spoken in the House in support of the hate crimes provisions of Bill C-41 and in support of amending the Canadian Human Rights Act. I have encouraged my colleagues on all sides of the House to support these initiatives. I have supported them because these initiatives are the right and decent thing to do as Canadians.

Amending the Canadian Human Rights Act is a matter of fundamental justice and equality. The goal of the act is not to confer special rights on anyone but rather to ensure equal rights for everyone. The measures we have taken in Bill C-41, the proposed amendments of the human rights act when they are introduced, are totally consistent with the commitment we have as Liberals and as Canadians to attack hatred and discrimination and promote tolerance.

• (1800)

I am pleased that in its ruling last Thursday the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously agreed that sexual orientation should be read into section 15 of the charter, thus barring discrimination against gays and lesbians. It is an important step toward full equality for all members of Canadian society.

On the thornier issue, the more difficult issue of extending benefits to same sex couples living together, the court was split. It will soon be up to us as legislators to decide what actions we should take as we consider the question in the debate today and in the weeks ahead.