

Voluntary Organizations

- Volunteer action must no longer be viewed as a disparate group of agencies and organizations independent from the state and the private sector;
- Volunteer action must be recognized as a major economic activity, since, in addition to creating jobs, it produces a series of available and universal services which raise the standard of living of our communities.
- The voluntary sector should be measured and examined by Statistics Canada and be recognized as a component of our Gross National Product.

However, Mr. Speaker, voluntary organizations would like a more concrete and incitative recognition to develop and renew community work. Indeed, these organizations complain that their members are getting tired, mainly because of a shortage of new members, the economic crisis and the fact that volunteer action is not recognized by society as a means of self-actualization.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that the Government should take action or provide tax incentives for charitable donations and volunteer workers themselves. We believe that a tax credit to reduce payable income tax modelled after the credit now provided for political donations would be quite justified. These tax changes would help to curtail a decrease in charitable donations; they would provide equal tax benefits to all donors, not only the wealthy; they would allow the organizations to rely less on Government subsidies, which is what we want; they would increase the capacity of voluntary organizations to reimburse current expenses related to volunteer work, such as the costs of baby-sitting, gasoline, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of women in my riding would like to do volunteer work, but they can't afford to. They can't afford to pay a baby-sitter or buy twenty dollars worth of gas so they can go and help someone who is worse off than they are.

This way, volunteers would be able to claim various expenses connected with volunteer work directly on their income tax returns, while people who are less well off would be in a better position to offer their expertise and help on a volunteer basis. And finally, it would be a way to increase and renew the membership of volunteer organizations.

Mr. Speaker, before formulating a policy on volunteer work, I believe it is essential to know numbers, objectives, trends and special interests if we are to consult with volunteer workers and establish with them the parameters they would like to see in Government measures that concern them.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I believe creating a national office for volunteer action is of primary importance to establish a registry of volunteer organizations working in Canada.

The National Office for Volunteer Action, or NOVA, under the responsibility of the Secretary of State of Canada or another agency, would be primarily responsible for preparing an exhaustive list of organizations, through compulsory registration for obtaining subsidies and/or permits. It would

define the concept or concepts of "charitable organizations—volunteer organizations—volunteer sector"; issue certificates of official accreditation to these organizations; recognize and validate volunteer work as practical job experience; and protect volunteer organizations and the public in general against fraud, and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, the Office would not be asked to regulate the work done by these organizations. That is not the purpose of this motion. On the contrary, the Office would protect volunteer organization against harmful abuse that, in time, tarnishes the image of volunteer work. Volunteer organizations themselves would like the Government to define and recognize in precise terms exactly what an organization of a charitable, religious, political or other nature is, so that they can operate more effectively in dealing with beneficiaries, donors and volunteer workers.

Mr. Speaker, the Government must take the initiative so we can be ready when the time comes to consult volunteer organizations on measures or policies affecting their operations, sources of financing, and fields of action and interests.

Establishing a national office for volunteer action would not, as some people would believe, involve great expense, because the size of this agency and its operations would be kept to a minimum.

The national office for volunteer action would fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Secretary of State, which is an existing Government agency; administered by an unpaid 20-member board of directors, the office would be supported by a small operational and permanent team.

To finance the expenditures of the office, we suggest that the necessary funds be recouped from savings made through better rationalization or integration of volunteer agencies and organizations, and by improving Government programs, grants and services.

Or again, Mr. Speaker, we might call upon such national organizations as the Red Cross, the United Way and others to lend the services of their staff to set up a permanent team. The office would thus rely on the expert assistance of people who are thoroughly familiar with the management of volunteer organizations.

Mr. Speaker, the office would thus be able to promote more regular and meaningful consultations between the Public Service and volunteer organizations. They would define Government measures and requirements concerning grants and financing, pinpoint their needs, advocate legislative action and Bills.

The office could also promote the training of volunteers and sponsor volunteer organizations with the private sector. Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that volunteer action and the various organizations be socially recognized as such, and that is why the Government must draft a national volunteer action policy.