

*Private Members' Business*

I like most members of the House will feel torn when I approach this bill because it affects all our staffs, the people we work with on a day-to-day basis. We know any time we see effective members that behind them is a group of very effective staff people who work closely with the members.

It not only affects those people who work for us, our staff, but in my opinion it would also have quite an effect on the Public Service, these thousands of dedicated, intelligent, committed people who are looking for career paths in government in the Public Service. I would like today to argue and address what I consider to be some of their legitimate concerns.

Before I get into the full argument, the position that our staffs are put into is very similar to the position that we as politicians are in. Especially in this day and age this is not a secure job to have. We all know that the average length of time that a member of Parliament is here is less than six years. Some are here longer than that; of course many are less. This insecurity that is created for us as politicians unfortunately is shared by our staffs. They also are faced with this concern for where their futures lie.

Therefore there is a very real need. In many respects my admiration for the member in introducing the bill is that there is a legitimate concern by all of us members for those staff persons.

I would like to make a quick summary of the bill. I think the hon. member actually did summarize it. I would like to resummarize it to make sure that I have it clear in my mind and everyone else's the points we are addressing.

The bill proposes that any person who is employed in a member's office will be entitled to a Public Service appointment without competition if any one of three conditions is satisfied. The key point in my mind is without competition.

First, the person could have been a Public Service employee prior to being employed by the member. Second, he could have qualified for appointment to the Public Service while being employed in the member's office. Third, and in my opinion the most dangerous one, is a person who has been employed in a member's office for a period of three years. If that has happened, all they

have to do is meet one of those qualifications and they have priority over the regular public servants for the position.

If we think of the stream of Public Service employees legitimately trying to pursue their aspirations, with this bill we are creating a back door, or perhaps a better analogy would be a revolving door where members of our staff, after completing three years' service can enter through the door and take priority over any of the public servants that apply for a job. This can be done without a competition. Granted, there are a few exceptions to that. It could be a person who has taken a leave of absence and upon returning has priority over the member's staff person or it could be somebody who has been bumped by that. Other than those minor exceptions, the staff member from the member's office who wants to get into the Public Service will take priority over all other public servants.

There is a test. They do have to qualify for the job. The hon. member has made that point and I would like to expand on it. There is a big difference between qualified for the job and the person who is the most qualified for the job.

I am sure there is some argument that will be brought out that this bill does not guarantee that the staff person will get the job, which is the point I address. They will not get the job unless they are qualified. I concede that that is a very legitimate and necessary step. I think you have to recognize that they automatically will receive priority over the existing civil service. To me, this just does not seem to meet a fairness test that I would apply as would most others.

It really bothers me that the fundamental principle of merit seems to be abandoned. It is no longer the best qualified candidate being considered for the position, not if it is one of our staff members. He has to be qualified and to have satisfied one of the three previous conditions.

I have met with many, many staff members since I have been on the Hill. I have gained quite an admiration for their ability and their competence. I seriously question whether we need to be concerned for their well-being. If they are competent, they should have no trouble competing in a legitimate competition. If they are the best person for the job then they will succeed.