

*Government Orders*

legislation should be consulted with a view to amending the legislation so it will better serve all Canadians.

The vast majority of public servants live in Ottawa, but in my province of Prince Edward Island we have the Department of Veterans Affairs which employs approximately 500 Islanders. Before too long we hope to have the GST processing centre in Summerside which will employ 300 to 400 people. As well as those two major government departments, we also have other federal public servants in my province.

Many of these federal government officials live in my riding. I have talked to many of them. I know they are really concerned about the legislation we have before us today.

Before I explain my objections to this legislation, I want to set out how we in the Liberal Party see the Public Service.

We believe that Canadians deserve a public service that delivers accessible quality services, is professional and non-partisan, treats all employees with respect and fairness, and is responsive to the needs of Canadians. That is how we in the Liberal Party see the Public Service. I must say that our party also supports the revitalization of the Public Service and we want to help public servants adapt to the rapid change.

As I said, the legislation it is operating under is old legislation. It is from the 1960s, and certainly there have been many changes in our country since then. We do need new legislation, but, as I said, the legislation we have before us today is certainly not the answer.

To sum up, we support a Public Service that is professional and non-partisan, that can provide Canadians with the high level of service they deserve for their tax dollars.

I am opposed to Bill C-26 because many parts of this legislation go against the principles I have just read. This legislation jeopardizes the merit principle in the hiring process because it does away with the competition process.

Right now, when an opening occurs, a competition is held and the person who gets the job is the person who finishes number one in the competition. This is as it should be, if we are going to get the best qualified people in our Public Service.

Under Bill C-26, when an opening occurs managers would only have to establish minimum qualifications for the position. In other words there is no competition. They can hire anyone who has the minimum qualifications. The best qualified candidate would not necessarily get the job.

It really disturbs me that we are talking here about legislation which could mean that in hiring for positions in the Public Service the best qualified person would not get the job.

For example, in my own province of Prince Edward Island, if the manager in one of the departments wanted to hire a lawyer who was a member of the Prince Edward Island bar, then he could hire any lawyer who is a member of the Prince Edward Island bar. It would not necessarily have to be the person best qualified. If being a member of the bar was the only qualification then the manager would have the leeway to do that. Indeed the manager could simply hire a friend of his.

I am against this legislation because I think it will open up the hiring process to abuse and favouritism. This legislation also jeopardizes the merit principle by changing the way employees are transferred within departments.

Right now competitions are held so that we get the best qualified person for the position. Under this proposed legislation that would no longer be the case. Managers would be able to move employees to any other position without regard to merit or other employees who may be equally or maybe better qualified.

• (1650)

If that were the case, what would happen to the morale of the Public Service if managers decided to favour their friends?

I have real problems with the government doing away with competitions for Public Service jobs. This is certainly not the type of system we want. I believe it will open the way in the hiring process to abuse and favouritism.

I know you have indicated that I only have a minute left, so I simply want to wrap up by saying that I will vote against this legislation at second reading for the reasons I have just outlined. I have a lot of other reasons which I do not have time to speak about today. Certainly, even