

Private Members' Business

Sixth, I have serious problems with the level of priority and the place of the proposed priority within the current priorities. In this regard I have two specific points to make. First, I would like to see this new priority given the lowest of the statutory priority considerations if the bill is passed, and, second, I would want the entitlement to be entitlement for consideration and not an entitlement for appointment.

To strike the balance between the intent and the bill, as it is presented, would be very difficult. There are employees representing us in the House of Commons who do deserve protection, priority, and understanding, but their experience should count in the final analysis and that should serve them well. Last, Mr. Speaker, we have to think of the other citizens of Canada, many of whom are in search of careers in the Public Service. For them the process is difficult, open, and competitive and that is the way it should be.

Mr. Scott Thorkelson (Edmonton—Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to participate in the debate. I am a member of the privileges and elections committee, the same committee that made this bill votable. I would like for a brief moment or two to go over the process of choosing a private members' bill and in fact what private members' hour is all about, including what we are trying to achieve and what McGrath suggested we try to achieve through the reforms to the House of Commons.

As you know, we draw by putting members' names into a draw bin. If they have a bill or a motion we put their name into two separate draw bins. We draw one for bills and one for motions. We draw ten for each and we make three votable.

We made this one votable because we felt that it was correcting an oversight in 1967 when members did not have any staff. Many members were concerned about this. It was done on a non-partisan basis, basically to bring forward the issue for debate and discussion. It has been the subject of healthy debate.

As you know this bill was originally introduced by a Liberal member in 1984, debated, the election came and it died on the Order Paper. It now has been reintroduced by a New Democratic member of Parliament.

It is ironic that the New Democrats wanted this bill to come forward for a vote at the committee and now they are backing off a little bit saying, "let us refer it to committee to discuss the over-all principle". I would assume they are facing pressure from the unions.

One other thing I would like to comment on is that when private members' bills and motions reach the House of Commons they are not perfect. They are meant to come to a vote on the principle and then be repaired or fixed up in a committee. Of course this one, as the hon. member just enumerated, has many flaws, including putting members' staff at the top of the priority list. I accept his recommendation that maybe they should be put at the bottom of the priority list. Perhaps what we are seeking is that they not be given priority but consideration in the draw or consideration for jobs when they come up.

For example, we have a computer bank in the Public Service and for each job opportunity five or eight names are drawn. Perhaps we could put members' staff in among those five or eight names so they would have to go through the competition process. But they would at least get to the competition. I think that is what we want to see.

All bills that have previously come before this House and previously gone to a legislative committee have had extensive amendments. In fact some would argue that some of the bills have not been very recognizable when they came back to the House.

That is the process of private members' hour and it is a healthy process. The Hon. James McGrath in presenting the McGrath committee reforms, of which this government accepted many, wanted private members to have more input, which they do.

The second point I would like to make is that members' staff make a tremendous contribution to the House of Commons and to the Parliament of Canada in the service of public policy. Most members' staff would be an asset in the Public Service and the way this bill is worded it would be upon death or defeat. So very few would get that far. So we are not talking about crowding out civil servants. In fact I would submit that we do not want to crowd out any civil servants.