

businessmen and individual donors. That is what the system was set up to do. It was not set up to create a parallel with charity.

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to commend my colleague, the Hon. Member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean), not only for the motion that he has put before the House this day, but for the work that he has undertaken prior to this motion in support of the the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations. It is one thing for a Member of the House of Commons to stand up in his or her place and make a case when a motion is before the House. The Hon. Member for Waterloo has done so on behalf of the National Voluntary Organizations in committee, and I can tell the House that he has done so in our discussions within the Party and has been very active in developing policy. Most important, much of his life has been dedicated to serving National Voluntary Organizations. I hope I am not out of place when I say that I know of some of the work that he and his family have undertaken, often at a financial loss to themselves as a family, I am sure. The motion that is before us is not only valid but is structured and placed before us by one who has given of himself to National Voluntary Organizations.

I would also like to make mention of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Patterson) with whom I spoke just the other day. He has given 50 years of his adult life to this place, to the churches of Canada and to the people of Canada. When we talk about voluntary organizations, these are the kinds of people and the kinds of donations that we have in mind. This is the kind of dedication that I believe should be mentioned from time to time and put on the public record. I believe it is because of these people and their contributions that Canada is a better place. I think that that is what is important about this debate today. That takes me to the issue that is before us, Mr. Speaker.

In Canada today, there are approximately 47,000 so-called registered charities under the Income Tax Act. Those charities are registered on the basis that they have the right to accept donations from the Canadian public, both individually and corporately, and can give tax receipts for the donations they have received. However, I would suggest that this is only a means to an end and is not the central issue. We must look at what these organizations do. They motivate people not only to serving Canadians but to serving others throughout the world who might be less fortunate than we are.

Let us return to the beginnings of our nation. It was the charitable organizations then, and possibly even today, which have given most to the cultural heritage of the country. They were then and are today instrumental in giving spiritual leadership to the people. They were the first to understand the need for an educational foundation for our young people and to sacrifice unstintingly to develop social services in the country. It is important to note that most of our social services were first provided entirely by the voluntary sector. We know that this is the case in the areas of health and education. Even today, the board of directors and many of the supporters of voluntary organizations are volunteers.

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I would suggest it is important to note as well that as society has moved toward the greater development of the social welfare state, there has been a shift, and not a subtle shift, from services provided by voluntary organizations and churches to services that the state now provides. While I am not decrying that in total, I do suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is a danger in that kind of a shift. I am talking about balance. Much of the criticisms of today's society are based upon the feeling that the Government is not doing enough in one area or another. However, I would suggest that too often the schools, churches, families and individuals have been very quick to remove themselves from their own responsibilities in these areas. That is why I think that the motion before us today is so important.

As I see it, the motion does two things. First, it recognizes the National Voluntary Organizations and second, it attempts to address how these organizations can better give service to the Canadian public while retaining their independence as voluntary organizations. It is most interesting to note that when speaking to people at the Department of External Affairs regarding the question of our responsibility as Canadians to citizens in other countries, we find that while there are many bilateral agreements between countries, the better use of public funds has come from the non-governmental organizations, almost without exception. It has come from organizations which place Canadians in other countries, not only to give the aid which is immediately necessary but, more importantly, to give direction to development. That is why it is so important to differentiate between what government can do and what volunteers can do.

● (1540)

Frankly, I found the comments of the Hon. Member for Mississauga North (Mr. Fisher) astounding. He chuckles about that, Mr. Speaker, but I thought he was very serious. His whole philosophy is based on the concept that government should take a certain amount of tax money, develop criteria and give grants, and that the National Voluntary Organizations could then function. But is the Government the best agency to set the criteria? I could give the Hon. Member a lot of evidence, although I do not have time today, of instances where the Government's handling of public funds has been wasteful and where there has been economic mismanagement. I could show him cases in development, and I am sure other Members of the House could as well, where voluntary organizations have been much more responsible and frugal in the use of the moneys available to them.

The question comes down to this, Mr. Speaker. Are these organizations more independent and can they function in terms of their duties and obligations more fully through a grant system or a tax credit system? With the grant system they must constantly go to the Government cap in hand and often must adjust their priorities and criteria to meet those of the Government. That is natural. The bureaucratic system will always demand that the criteria be those which the bureaucracy has established rather than those the National Voluntary Organizations feel are valid.