

Private Members' Business

In closing let me confirm my support and my party's support for the member's motion. Let me congratulate him for raising it. I look forward in the not too distant future to action being taken so that the work women do which is presently unpaid will be paid. It is important for the government to make a commitment to ensure progress in this area.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Côté (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to join my colleague from Abitibi and the previous speaker for the New Democratic Party in a discussion of this sensitive and very important issue of compensation for women who remain at home.

I am sure no one objects to the principle as such. I would say the government's efforts in this respect, especially during the past eight years, are reflected in the way it is channelling benefits to women, one example being the benefits that have just been endorsed by this House.

However, although I agree with the principle, I intend to demonstrate that implementing this motion raises a number of practical questions as well as the question of equity.

In any case, I welcome this opportunity to speak to this item of Private Members' Business, Motion No. 563, which reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider paying a salary to women who remain at home.

First of all, let us look at the objectives of this motion. It proposes that the government pay a salary to a group of persons under certain conditions. Payment of a salary implies that such payment is made for services rendered.

Today I would like to discuss how these services would be defined and how they would be quantified under this kind of government program. I would also like to consider how a government program could offer a salary exclusively to women, for such is the wording of the motion, who remain in the home and not to other persons who might provide the same services.

Subsequently, I intend to show that any attempt to implement such a program would soon face serious

problems, whether we are talking about equity or practical aspects, that would probably be insurmountable.

When developing a government program that provides for paying a salary to a group of persons, we must assume, first of all, that this group can be clearly defined, and second, that payment would be made for the services they provide. However, the proposal put forward in the motion by the member for Abitibi does not meet either of these fundamental criteria.

Let me explain. First, let us look at how the target clientele, women who remain in the home—according to the wording of the motion—would be defined for the purposes of eligibility for a government benefit.

The group "women" is a group that is readily identifiable, of course, and could be defined so as to include all persons of the female sex, 18 years of age or over, for instance. However, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms expressly prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, and the government has had to change its own programs to eliminate this concept, because it constituted discrimination.

• (1655)

This means the government cannot introduce a program that discriminates against members of one sex, as this motion sets out to do. A way would have to be found to include men who remain at home and look after the children, for instance. It will be necessary to identify persons, and I say "persons" who remain at home, without reference to men or women.

How would a government program implement this concept? The government could not simply ask people whether they see themselves as "remaining at home", since the question would be too subjective. Another criterion could be labour market participation. For instance, all gainfully employed workers could be excluded. But in that case, what about self-employed workers who work at home and who apply for a salary as persons who "remain at home"? Should these workers be excluded? And if so, how? What about part-time workers who spend part of their time at home? So you see how hard it would be to implement this kind of concept.