

Volunteer Firemen

the importance of the motion's being implemented, is Sherwood, which is smaller than Charlottetown. In that village of less than 10,000 people there are 30 members of the fire department. Every single one is a volunteer. Today they receive something like \$1,000. Again I stress that that is not salary, payment, recompense or remuneration. It is merely a part coverage of expenses incurred by firemen in the performance of their duties. For some that \$1,000 will cover pretty well all their expenses. For many more there are other out of pocket expenses they will be called upon to meet themselves.

● (1730)

I want to elaborate on that point because I think it is important. It is especially significant in terms of the motion we are discussing this afternoon. Sometimes those of us who are laymen wonder how much is incurred by a fireman by way of expenses. One would perhaps assume that with fire trucks, hoses, water and everything else being looked after by the fire department, there would be very few out of pocket expenses for the individual member of the fire department. That is a misrepresentation; it does not accord with the facts. Everything from clothing to extra car insurance to, for example, time lost on the job as I mentioned earlier, is involved in the fulfilment of the duty of a fireman in every community, not just in my own.

The fire department in Sherwood, the smaller community I was referring to, had something like 92 responses last year. In addition, it had 44 training sessions. Therefore, we are not just talking about the time firemen take out of their busy lives, their personal and family affairs, to put out fires, but also about the time they devote to training. That has to be calculated into any equation involving the estimation of the sacrifice made by our firefighters in every community in this great dominion.

In Sherwood, and again it is just an illustration, members are required to put in five complete weekends per year on duty at that particular station. That represents a tremendous sacrifice. It is one of the conditions that motivates me this afternoon to speak as vigorously as I can on behalf of the motion.

I wish to use one final illustration. I referred to Charlottetown, the capital city of Prince Edward Island, and the smaller community of Sherwood, which is in my riding as well. I might also cite the example of Parkdale. It, too, has a fire department. It is manned by dedicated and community-minded people who make the same kind of sacrifices as those made by volunteer firefighters in Charlottetown and Sherwood. The fire department of Parkdale consists of 28 members. Every single one is a volunteer. Not one is recompensed other than by way of looking after some of the expenses incurred in the fulfilment of the duty of being a fireman in that particular community. Each fireman is allotted or allocated \$400 to cover his or her expenses. That does not go very far in this day and age, especially when one considers the very expensive commodities such as clothing that are involved in being a fireman, not to mention time lost from earning one's livelihood.

[Mr. McMillan.]

In the community of Parkdale, the firemen responded to something like 50 to 60 calls last year. I understand in other years the number of calls has been even higher. One can imagine how much sacrifice is made by the firemen in that community when he considers there are only 28 members to respond to as many as 60 calls. You can see how thinly their resources are spread and what sacrifices are made in that community by firemen who are so dedicated and community-minded.

I conclude by saying how much I support the motion. It is an excellent one. The motion would have the Income Tax Act amended so that firemen could deduct from their incomes \$1,000 for all expenses incurred in the exercise of their duties. It would give them absolution from taxes on all indemnities paid to them in the fulfilment of their duties. The motion is one that I support vigorously, without qualification, with great pride and with enthusiasm. I urge members on all sides of the House to give it their endorsement as well.

Mr. Ron Ritchie (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I too congratulate the hon. member for Abitibi (Mr. Caouette). All of us know, and it has been reiterated a few times in the last several minutes, how important volunteer firemen, their activities and their commitment, are in a great many communities in this country, not only communities wholly reliant on voluntary efforts, but communities which cannot from their own funds support a sufficiently paid fire force and therefore must have it supplemented by volunteers.

The hon. member will be glad to know that he is not alone, apart from hon. members who voiced their support in the House this afternoon. The Department of Finance has been receiving a great many representations, perhaps over some years, but certainly recently, on this subject. I think it might be useful to put a certain perspective on the actions that are proposed.

Most of the representations that have been received in recent months have dealt with the second part of this resolution, the proposal that the allowable expense be increased for income tax purposes. Very few have dealt with the first part, that any indemnity received by volunteer firemen not be included in taxable income.

Certainly as far as the allowance goes, if that allowance was right in the first place, the allowance cannot be considered large enough today if it was large enough originally. I think that allowance goes back to the year 1953, if recollection serves me right, and it has been an unchanged allowance through that period. We all know how much inflation has occurred since that time and how much costs have gone up.

I am told there are some costs incurred, to which volunteer firemen are subject to, which have not been mentioned in the chamber this afternoon. I am told that volunteer firemen often, or perhaps always, cannot get insurance to cover the times when they are rushing to a fire in their own cars. Some people paid very dearly for that part of their volunteer effort.