

• (1750)

Worded as the bill is at present, the member's employee with only three years and one month of service to that member would automatically get priority for appointment to the Public Service. That would be not only over other public servants and other Canadians, but even over career public servants of perhaps 20 or 25 years who had suffered the unfortunate circumstance of a lay-off.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the government in the past five or six years has deliberately at the request of Canadians, cut the size of the Public Service, cut the cost of government, and in the process eliminated well over 12,000 permanent jobs. There are many public servants who today are in that lay-off position with supposed priority for re-entry into the Public Service. It does not seem fair that a staffer in the office of a member of Parliament would automatically have priority over those long service employees who have been caught in the unfortunate vagaries of the downsizing of the Public Service.

Again, what does the bill mean when it talks of an employee? Lacking a better definition one must do what the courts of this land do and revert to the dictionary. There, Webster states that it is a person who is employed by another, usually for wages or salary, and in a position below the executive level.

Reverting to the bill's original intent, I have little doubt that the concept was intended for members who have been full-time, permanent, 40 hours a week, in the service of a member here on the Hill. As it reads at the moment, however, a person who has only been working one day a week, or for that matter, perhaps even a few hours a week in a member's office, would be eligible for this priority. Once again, that does not seem fair and certainly requires clarity and elaboration.

What does the word "entitlement" mean?

Mr. Funk: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hesitate to interrupt the member mid-flight, but I would like to point out to him, as I am sure he might have forgotten, that we are debating an amendment at this point which in fact withdraws this bill and refers it to a committee where the principles can be discussed, but where the objectionable aspect—

Private Members' Business

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I am sure the hon. member realizes that. I am also sure that he will speak to that.

Mr. Bird: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am moving my case in that direction, and I appreciate the intervention of the hon. member.

The very fact that there are so many areas of clarification required brings me to the point that I do not think merely referring it to a committee and then bringing it back is adequate. I believe this bill needs a lot more attention, philosophically and in all kinds of detail.

In closing, I would like to recap some of the serious flaws that I have identified—and I hope you will give me time for the interruption that has occurred in my otherwise quite well organized remarks.

First, I feel that the original intent behind this proposal has become muddled and widened far beyond what was originally conceived, and I do not think an amendment to review it in committee would be a sound approach.

Second, I would like it clarified that this priority only becomes operative when the member by whom the affected individual is employed ceases, for whatever reason, to be a member. It should not be accessible by someone who has simply resigned or, in the extreme case, by someone who has been discharged for laziness, incompetence, or other misconduct.

Third, I believe this bill would only be applicable if it referred specifically to the Ottawa-based staff of members and, yet, as I think about that, I am not so sure that those who give their long service in the constituency should not also be considered. Again, I believe that perhaps it is more than just mere amendment and review that is required. The entire philosophy deserves some rethinking.

Fourth, I believe the concept of long service needs greater emphasis. Not only is the three-year qualification far too short, but under section 4.1(a) and 4.1(b), even this does not seem to be required.

Fifth, and I am coming to the end, I believe the concept of who is and who is not an employee requires clarification. To afford such protection to a person who has maintained only the most casual connection albeit for a three-year basis, would, in my opinion be intolerable.