

*Private Members' Business*

1980 to recognize the growth of inflation at that time. Since 1980 it has stayed exactly the same as it is today.

Over the last 14 years annual inflation rates have increased as many of us know. In fact, most of this honorarium now is subject to tax. Unfortunately this effectively takes the expense reimbursements away from the firefighter.

In my opinion this is mostly unfair and that is why I brought forward this motion again this session. I brought this forward in the last House. Unfortunately at that time it was not a votable motion. It was talked out by the government members who used to be on this side of the House. There are one or two of them on the other side of the House now.

Volunteer firefighters provide an invaluable and vital service to our communities and form a solid protection base under which rural communities exist within this country. Not only do volunteer firefighters provide a service to rural communities, that is where they are mostly seen, but also to urban areas, as members know, where we have a number of volunteer firefighters.

There are almost 76,000 volunteer firefighters across the country. It is a significant number of people who have dedicated their time and service to their country and have really proved to Canadians what volunteerism is all about.

These volunteers spend many hours in training and on the upkeep of their fire stations, the care and maintenance of their fire equipment, all without any remuneration. They drive their privately owned vehicles in response to emergency alarms. Their privately owned vehicles are also used to travel many miles to deal with training sessions. Many of these people spend a number of hours throughout the week in specific training sessions to help them in doing their job.

Frequently volunteer fire departments are the only service organization in a number of communities across this country. They are the ones out there helping our children in distress, the ones out there on the roads dealing with the messy situation at a traffic accident which many of us would rather not see.

These are the people behind the scenes whom we do not see. They are in the face of these tragic situations, dealing with them. They are the ones raising money for community halls and community centres. They are the ones in small towns across this country who are the backbone of volunteer work in these communities.

They are the people who really keep these communities going. They can be found taking all sorts of other roles within communities such as organizing hockey and baseball teams, community garage sales and fund raising for many important community events.

It would hardly seem right when it is remembered that in many volunteer fire departments the practice is to pool those moneys received from this disbursement of a lot of their hard work and labour. A lot of times this pooled money is put back into the firehall.

As members know, in many rural areas money is not available to provide some of the needed equipment. A lot of time the reimbursements they get for some of their own expenses go back into these community halls, into their equipment and uniforms. Basically our rural firefighters and our volunteer firefighters are paying for the service that they provide to our communities. Obviously these men and women are dedicated volunteers as has been stated and they take great pride in their communities. I believe it is only right and proper for the government to recognize this contribution and that is why I brought this motion forward.

• (1750)

Let me stress once again that these men and women, these very proud Canadians, are giving freely of their time and energy and have put their lives on the line for many Canadians.

I had the opportunity of going into a fire with some of my local volunteer firefighters. There are 13 in my area. They took me into a burning house all packed up in a training exercise. They showed me what it was like, what their lives were like, on many occasions. I was scared. It was a very scary, very tough situation, and it really gave me a good sense of where these people are coming from on a daily basis.

I do not feel that they have been recognized at all for this service and I am not suggesting in any way that these people want special recognition. In fact, a lot of them would wonder why I am up here trying to give them more money because most of them in the earlier years did not even use up their full compensation. It is an important thing. As a House we should recognize it, for recognition is long overdue.

We have seen the effects in the recessionary years across this country. More and more communities are turning to volunteer firefighters to provide these essential services. As I said, the money is not there and how much would it cost Canada if we had to pay firefighters instead of relying on the generosity of volunteers?

There can be few people in this country who do not know, who have not been directly affected by these volunteer firefighters. More now than ever we need to strengthen and expand the forces to fill the gaps that are occurring because of the lack of services provided because of the downturn in the economy.

I put it to this House that the costs involved in providing this increase are small compared with the savings made in terms of