

*Private Members' Business*

That is why, according to this motion, we have a duty to amend, yes, amend all provisions of Canadian legislation concerning spouses. It is a matter of justice, fairness and equality for all citizens.

Let us recall that, last May, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously agreed that sexual orientation should be added to section 15 of the charter, thus prohibiting discrimination against homosexual men and women.

While the cities of Toronto, Vancouver and Ottawa—to name but a few—as well as many private and public companies also recognize same sex spouses, we in the Parliament of Canada, a supposedly tolerant country that allows anyone to make racist comments or distribute hate propaganda, deny such a basic right to 10 per cent of our population.

• (1115)

I see this as an injustice. A closer look at the definition of the term “discrimination” shows that it means imposing on an individual or group of individuals certain burdens, obligations or—as in this case—disadvantages that are not imposed on other groups. Discrimination also means denying or restricting access to the opportunities, benefits or advantages offered to other members of society. That is discrimination.

In fact, the Quebec human rights commission has recommended that the government review all its laws and regulations and pass a law that would make all legislation dealing with spousal issues comply with the charter, so that same sex spouses can enjoy the same rights as heterosexual common law couples.

Will allowing same sex spouses to take bereavement leave when their lifelong partners die change anything for heterosexual Canadians? Will allowing same sex spouses to receive benefits from public pension plans after their partners die or to contribute to spousal RRSPs change anything for the remaining 90 per cent of the Canadian population? I do not even want to hear the argument that such a measure would result in higher costs.

According to the studies done by many private and even public companies, it would cost less than 1 per cent to correct this situation. Since this Parliament is supposedly not homophobic—as many members keep bragging about in this House—I see no reason why we should not recognize same sex spouses. This would be quite normal and not a privilege granted to one group of people. On the contrary, it would simply be fair to a segment of our population.

I remind you that this is 1995. Today's reality is completely different from what it was 50, 30 or even 10 years ago. Federalists boast that this institution, the Parliament of Canada, is not out of step, obsolete or ossified. They should just prove it and stop talking about the status quo. The status quo is nothing

but a vacuum. Again, voting in favour of this motion does not recognize any special rights except for the right to equality. Quebecers are fed up with the double standard inherent in this government's policies. We already know that a sovereign Quebec will fight such measures. The question is: Will the Canadian government be as courageous as the Quebec government?

[English]

**Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, welcome back to the House. It is good to be here.

It is a privilege to speak to this motion today because the issue of same sex marriage has been raised to such a high level of awareness in Canada.

As I see it the motion can be approached in two different ways. We can talk about the morality of the homosexual lifestyle which is a bona fide thing to do. After all, the gay and lesbian community bases its arguments for inclusion on moral grounds arguing that what it does is morally acceptable and therefore worthy of government recognition. However, it is not necessary to cast same sex benefits in a moral framework. We can leave aside the moral question for another day and approach this from a pragmatic viewpoint. To set the stage for a pragmatic discussion, allow me to talk about definitions for a moment because this motion is really about societal definitions.

• (1120)

Our society is becoming less and less categorical in its societal definitions and more graduated in every way. Let me give an example. There used to be a huge distinction between social classes in society. If one was born a peasant one could never be a nobleman and vice versa. However, for a variety of historical reasons the distinctions between classes disappeared and status and influence are now seen to be on a gradual continuum, except perhaps for a few people born lucky like the Royals or maybe the Kennedys.

Morality is another example. Things used to be seen in black and white in a moral sense because the laws people lived by were held to be revealed by God. Although these laws seemed arbitrary, the sharply defined moral categories lent a certain stability to life in society.

Over the last two centuries people became less convinced about God and divine law so the old value categories became blurred and fuzzy. The new values are relative to each situation. People say that there are no absolutes and that each situation must be judged on its own merits.

The assault on all social definitions in our society also applies to the family. Last year was the UN year of the family and the theme was “The Family—The Smallest Democracy at the Heart of Society”. This statement marks an enormous redefinition in our culture, that a family is a democracy.