

[*Translation*]

Mr. Henri Tousignant (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief, since I have been asked to share the last few minutes with my Opposition colleagues.

I am glad the subject was put on the agenda by the Official Opposition. I must admit that in the five years I have been sitting in the House, it is the first time I have seen the Official Opposition move such a constructive motion, and they ask to be congratulated.

If we really take the trouble to give the subject the attention it deserves, it could have a tremendous impact on this country, and the economic benefits will be very substantial indeed.

Have we ever stopped to think what a country would be if it did not have the voluntary sector? It would be unthinkable. So if we can bring this debate, which has been conducted with very little show of partisanship—it must not be a partisan debate in any case—to a satisfactory end, I am sure the entire country will benefit. Why? Because if we stop and think for a minute, this debate and I think we should realize this will help us make all the Members of this House and Canadians who are watching us more aware of what the voluntary sector represents for a country.

If we have the sense to try and harmonize all these efforts and all the potential that exists in our country, if we take the trouble to use these resources intelligently, Mr. Speaker, there are people out there who need only the slightest encouragement to get on board and serve their community.

We see this constantly in our communities, and when we visit our ridings, we see all these groups, these service clubs consisting of men and women, some of whom spend as much as one-third of their time on volunteer work. If that work could be quantified, I think that we could demonstrate that the voluntary sector makes a considerable contribution to the gross national product. If we were wise enough to recognize that contribution in some way or other, either through a tax deduction or otherwise, I would favourably consider the setting up of a House committee. I hope that such a committee would apply itself to the task at hand in order to achieve tangible results. We would thus be able to tap that potential of voluntary work.

There are so many Canadians throughout the country doing voluntary work at present and still more would be ready to do so. There are many retired individuals who are well off; the wives of tradesmen, for example, or other professionals who live at home or have raised their family. They have great qualifications and would be ready to make them available to their community. But first the Government of Canada should ask them to come forward and show them its interest and gratitude?

Mr. Speaker, I realize that some members of the official opposition would like to speak. To conclude my remarks, I hope that the debate will remain non-partisan, that it will

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continue in committee and that we will be intelligent enough as managers of this country to take advantage of that enormous potential in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Guilbault): Questions, comments, debate. The Hon. Member for Don Valley West.

● (1740)

[*English*]

Mr. John Bosley (Don Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I gather that it may fall to me to close this debate today. If there are others who wish to speak, I would be happy to reduce the length of my comments.

I accept the good will and the sentiments of the words of the previous speaker. Perhaps he will understand and even forgive me if I become to some degree what he might regard as slightly partisan. However, I will not be partisan on the question of voluntary associations or voluntary work. We all derive benefits from that work of hundreds of thousands of Canadians who do whatever they can to help their fellow Canadians. That is not a partisan matter. I believe everyone in the House from all parties believes it is absolutely essential.

There is a distinction which must be made between the activities of associations and their members and the frustration that the leaders of those associations feel about what is truthfully significant inactivity on the part of the federal Government to resolve the problems which their institutions have been dealing with, as members trying to help others, for ten years. Let me give an example in order to help members opposite understand.

In 1978, the Department of Revenue issued a circular, later withdrawn, which attempted to come to grips with the issue of what is an activity by a registered charity that is prohibited by law. Let me quote one of the issues raised in this circular. It states that written or oral representations to the involved Minister of the Crown are also looked upon as an acceptable activity on the condition that such representations are limited to presenting the organization's interests and points of view, and otherwise do not attempt to influence legislation.

According to the common law and language of this circular, attempting to influence legislation is illegal for the institutions we are talking about. In other words, the document entitled "Charity Today and Tomorrow", which has sat on the desks of Ministers of the Crown for some years now, is conceivably an illegal document and the presentation of that document is illegal.

In the context of what is not or should not be acceptable activity in terms of public purpose or benefit, the organizations themselves do not know whether they are in fact at risk of losing their charitable registration when they make a representation. While members may say that this has never happened and does not happen, we were told by the Civil Liberties Association last week that they thought they were taking reasonably sensible action in raising some money to defend a person before the courts on a human rights issue, which is their purpose and objective, but were told that they could not do