

Private Members' Business

• (1320)

The board concludes its letter by stating that it: "Urges the federal government to reconsider its position relative to funding of the centre".

With regard to the parliamentary secretary's second observation, I believe that the word has indeed been spread about. The centre is well known throughout Canada and the rest of the world. A number of the centre's users are themselves located outside of Canada. It has a well respected reputation both in Europe and in the United States.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour is wrong to suggest that as the centre did not have to worry about where its funding was coming from, it may have done a less than adequate job of spreading the word. This is simply not an accurate assessment.

I do think that the real concern now is that without secured funding the centre may have to worry a great deal about its fiscal state rather than devote its full attention to the goals of preserving the lives of workers. This would be a truly tragic event but it need not be the case.

In conclusion, the government must realize that the most prudent course of action to pursue would be to continue providing the centre with full funding. In the final analysis, the health and safety of Canadian workers and the high costs both in human and fiscal terms far outweigh the amount of funding the centre currently receives from the federal government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Allan Koury (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve): Madam Speaker, hon. members, I wish to assure you that the CCOHS will continue to be a useful, impartial and financially viable source of information on occupational health and safety in Canada. I also wish to tell hon. members that the government's decision concerning CCOHS funding is not an attempt to privatize the Centre, because that would destroy this unique three-way partnership and the unbiased nature of what the CCOHS produces.

The purpose of the government's decision is quite simply to help the CCOHS be more self-financing by recovering a larger share of its production costs.

Further to the statement by the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Keyes), I would like to say clearly

that no one is suggesting having workers pay fees for this essential information on occupational health and safety or charging for information requested over the toll-free telephone lines. The CCOHS will continue to apply its policy of free access to information. The cost recovery principle simply means getting back the costs of editing, processing and distributing the information, and not the cost of the information itself.

It is therefore essential that individuals, unions and small businesses have easy access to inexpensive information on what must be done to protect their health and safety.

The centre has been a focus for tripartite co-operation, innovation and efficient information sharing since it was established in 1978. It is an essential and unique component of the national information system Canadians have developed to protect the lives and safety of workers and support a strong economy based on partnership.

Because of demographic changes and the resulting shortage of new workers and skilled workers in certain areas, some corporations are becoming increasingly competitive in their bid to attract the best workers, emphasizing factors such as high-quality workplaces and health and safety aspects. Social changes, including a change in attitudes to the environment, have made employers more aware of their social responsibilities, including those relating to the health and well-being of their employees.

I am convinced that the time and energy spent on trying to change the government's decision and condemning the phasing-out of the centre should be directed towards finding constructive ways of financing the centre.

In view of the present state of the economy in this country, it is imperative to reduce the deficit and increase productivity and efficiency. The latter is also necessary if we are to compete effectively on international markets. In fact, all levels of government in this country have found it necessary to cut back on a number of services and programs.

The April 1989 cabinet decision on the budget was that the centre should become financially more self-sufficient over the next three years for the information services provided to the users of the centre. This decision was based on the fiscal restraints confronting the govern-