

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Does the House agree to stand all public bills and orders preceding Order No. 33?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

* * *

REGISTERED CHARITIES ACT

MEASURE TO ESTABLISH

Mr. Walter McLean (Waterloo) moved that Bill C-233, to encourage the role of the voluntary sector in Canadian society, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of Bill C-233 is to encourage government action to support the voluntary sector in our Canadian society. The bill calls for a mechanism. It calls for a commission to take existing reports, studies and recommendations and consolidate their suggestions for early action by the government.

The importance or the relevance of the bill is that if we are to maintain a caring society, it is imperative that we undergird the voluntary efforts of millions of Canadians in the face of today's inflationary times and the difficult economic situation many Canadians are facing.

The bill encourages action in two areas affecting the voluntary sector. It relates to the tax law and suggests the need for an amendment which could be prepared to give donors to voluntary agencies the same tax incentives as are given to those who donate to political parties. This was addressed by my colleague, the hon. member for Edmonton South (Mr. Roche), on June 9, 1980, when he spoke on a private member's motion.

The second matter to which the bill relates is the sharing of goods and services and the importance of taking tax dollars which have already been used to provide goods and equipment for government to operate and communicate and see that that asset is used during off-hours or non-peak periods by voluntary agencies in order to maximize the use of those tax dollars. This can be done and has been done in some areas where there has been a will to do so. The bill lists several areas which are examples only of what might be done.

The idea I am setting forward in Bill C-233 is not a new one. It has its roots in a substantial volume of research and study which can be traced at least as far back as the 1951 Massey report of the Royal Commission on Arts, Letters and Sciences. There is a large body of research into the needs of the voluntary sector as well as the different means of providing aid in kind assistance to address particular needs. My bill calls for a commission to report its recommended guidelines to the Minister of Finance within six months of its establishment.

Registered Charities

In encouraging passage today by the House of Bill C-233 I would like to underline the importance of the contribution made by the voluntary sector to both the Canadian way of life and our national economy. I do so having been involved in the voluntary sector as a field director for CUSO, as a director of the national voluntary thrust of the Canadian Centennial International Development Program, as an executive director of the Manitoba Association for World Development, as chairman of the Inter-Church Aid Committee and as one who has sat on the boards of a number of voluntary agencies nationally and a number of community and service clubs at the local level.

According to a survey, highlighted by Statistics Canada in the context of National Volunteer Week which was held April 27 to May 3, some 2.7 million Canadians, or 15.2 per cent of the country's working age population, performed volunteer work between February, 1979, and February, 1980. The survey, to be published later this month, was the largest ever conducted on this topic in Canada. A total of some 18,700 households were contacted, which represented 43,000 persons. Results also indicate that 54 per cent of the volunteers were women and 46 per cent were men. An estimated 49 per cent of the volunteers were between the ages of 25 and 44. Another 36 per cent were 45 years of age or over, with the remaining 15 per cent divided almost equally between the 20 to 24 and 15 to 19 age groups.

I would like to quote briefly from the introduction to the forthcoming publication, as follows:

While volunteer work is as old as charity itself, it has become increasingly topical in recent years, and the escalating interest appears to be attributable to a variety of factors. In part it can be related to the advocacy of women's groups and others who wish to promote the recognition of the importance, relevance, and value of unpaid community work, both in itself, and as it relates to possible subsequent paid employment. It can also be traced to a recognition that during times of fiscal restraint at all levels of government, the work of volunteers represents an even greater contribution to community well-being, which would otherwise not exist. Current levels of interest in this topic are also a result of a growing awareness that many of the services provided by volunteer workers, and the profound dedication which they bring to their work, cannot be fully duplicated in the field of social services provided by paid workers.

These figures in the survey now provide an up-to-date framework for the body of research which includes "People in Action", the 1977 report of the National Advisory Council on Voluntary Action, which was presented to the then secretary of state, the present Minister of the Environment (Mr. Roberts). It also includes two reports prepared under the auspices of the Canadian Council on Social Development entitled "Volunteers: the Untapped Potential" which was produced in 1975 and "Tapping the Untapped Potential: Towards a National Policy on Volunteerism" which was published in 1977. The body of research culminated in the briefs prepared for the meeting between government and the voluntary sector held January 29 to January 31 here in Ottawa called "Consultation '81" and organized by the Committee of National Voluntary Organizations.

Two additional statistics which were circulated at Consultation '81 arose from the labour force survey released by Statistics Canada on January 28 of this year. Total volunteer hours