

Private Members' Business

more than 450,000 tax filers at a cost of more than \$195 million to the federal government.

• (1945)

In conclusion, at the start of my remarks I set out a test that a proposed measure must pass in order to gain support in this House. In considering Bill C-277, I have tried to apply that test with the special consideration of the existing measures in the Income Tax Act that aim to assist Canadians with disabilities or serious permanent illness.

Unfortunately, Bill C-277 fails that test. Consequently I find it difficult to support this proposal and I would urge other members of this House to vote against this bill.

Mr. Jim Karpoff (Surrey North): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise tonight to speak to this bill which the New Democratic Party and I support.

We have a growing concern in this country about escalating health care costs. This bill is designed to make it possible for people to remain within their own homes. We have a tendency to take too legalistic an interpretation of things within the tax legislation when it deals with ordinary Canadians. We find legalistic loopholes to allow big multinational corporations to write off all sorts of things within the tax system.

The reason the government does not want to allow air conditioning devices to be considered a tax expense is it says the definition that is now used indicates the device must be exclusively defined for a medical purpose. If it has any other kind of purpose, it is not acceptable. That is far too narrow a definition to meet the needs of ordinary Canadians who have multiple sclerosis.

British Columbia has just taken a major look at health care reform. The total thrust of its total health care reform package is called "Closer to Home". It allows people with health care conditions to receive service within their own home.

This bill, by allowing people to have a tax break for air conditioners, could in fact make it possible for a person to reside in his or her own home at a fraction of the health care cost of going into an intermediate care or long-term care institution.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society sets it out very clearly in its letter. It says: "Being in an air conditioned environment allows people who have MS to carry on with their daily activities". Indeed, it can be said to assist crippled persons in walking.

What we have is a very simple, very logical and very humane proposal that says when a person has a chronic illness and there is a device that will improve his or her medical functioning, he or she should get a tax break for it. I think that is eminently fair, particularly when we start looking at the concept of tax fairness that we have developed in our system.

The government is saying it will not allow the person with MS to have a tax break for an air conditioner but it allowed firms like Montreal Trust to earn \$62 million last year and pay no tax. There were all sorts of tax write-offs for it on earnings of \$62 million. In addition, it was given a tax credit of \$1.4 million.

The person with MS cannot get a tax break for an air conditioner.

• (1950)

Coca-Cola earned \$24.5 million, paid zero income tax and got a \$1 million tax credit. Mountain Pipeline, that great pipeline company in British Columbia earned \$16 million. It paid no tax and got a \$100,000 tax credit.

That is this government's idea of tax fairness. We will not give the person with multiple sclerosis a tax break to install an air conditioner that will improve his or her life and possibly keep him or her out of an institution. We will give our tax breaks to our friends, Coca-Cola, Trustco and other big companies.

I feel this is a very fair piece of legislation that is designed to help the ordinary Canadian that is in a difficult spot. I urge the House to support it.

Mrs. Louise Feltham (Wild Rose): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons, I welcome this opportunity to speak on Bill C-277.

As has been pointed out, this bill seeks to amend the Income Tax Act to allow expenses for air conditioners to be eligible expenses for the medical expense tax credit.