

*Private Members' Business*

In response to the Reform member for Skeena, I think the first argument he made against the motion was on the grounds that we really had to recognize the differences in the cost of living in various places in Canada in terms of remuneration public servants receive. I challenge that on a couple of grounds. The country, the courts, and public sympathy are headed in the other direction. So even in the context of being responsive to the will of the nation, we are heading in another direction.

More appropriate to the political affiliation of the member who made the suggestion, I wonder about the cost of bureaucracy in trying to determine pay packages on the basis of regional costs of living. I believe there would have to be a new department of the cost of living. I cannot see that being consistent with decreasing the cost of governance in Canada. Quite the contrary. That would be a pretty expensive proposition and one I think the member should reconsider in the face of his own party's positions on those issues.

The second issue raised by the member for Skeena and repeated by the member for Joliette had to do with isolation pay and the need to recognize cost of living. I had the good fortune of visiting Iqaluit last fall with the social security review group, and I was shocked at the price of a banana in that community. I reassure both the member for Joliette and the member for Skeena that isolation pay and bonuses related to isolation would not be affected by the intentions of this motion. This would all be a part of job classifications and pay related to job classification and not related to isolation. Hopefully some of their concerns would be reassured by that.

The member for Skeena mentioned that he was fearful that this was the thin edge of the wedge. I agree with the member, but I think we are heading in the other direction. I would turn that metaphor on its head and say quite appropriately that we are heading to the narrow point of the triangle, not to the wide edge of the triangle, and it is just a matter of time.

It should not be surprising that I have fewer exceptions to take with the member for Broadview—Greenwood in terms of his comments, other than whether or not the nation requires national standards, the nation requires national values. Questions of fairness in remuneration speak to the need for a national value in Canada. That value is fairness, which the government has to acknowledge and respect. I say that because this discussion follows the recent debate on Bill C-64 on pay equity. It strikes me that the values behind this motion and that bill are the same. How can the government that supports the notion of pay equity based on questions of gender or minorities continue to support the notion of regional disparities in terms of how much public servants are paid depending on geography?

• (1155)

The other important consideration is the inevitability of this happening anyway. I suppose this would appeal to members represented by the member for Skeena and the Reform Party in terms of the savings involved in doing this as an act of will rather than being forced to do it through the courts with all the costs associated to have these decisions forced upon us through the legal system. It is very important for us to recognize the need to do what ultimately will happen anyway without having to be told to do it.

By way of history, the previous government reacted to the strike in 1989 in Halifax and Dartmouth by enacting back to work legislation contained in Bill C-49. At that time as part of that back to work legislation a conciliation board was established that concluded that regional rate policies would not be maintained much longer. That conciliation board labelled the policy discriminatory and ordered a new collective agreement to bring east coast and west coast workers into parity.

We have already been told by a process the previous government put in place to deal with this inequity. It is long overdue that we do that. It is an important opportunity for this government to meet the commitments that were made to act in a fashion that is consistent with what we said in opposition. At that time many members said these were discriminatory practices.

As I said before, this government is promoting equity in terms of pay regardless of gender and ethnic background. It would only be fair to eliminate discrimination based on geography as well.

I will speak for a moment on the question of where this regional pay package idea came from. I do not know for certain but I assume there are a couple of historical factors that come into play here. My sense is that at the time these pay regimes were affected jobs were probably less well defined. Consequently what one did in terms of a job classification in one part of Canada was probably quite different from what one did as a part of a job classification in another part of Canada.

In the course of collective bargaining over the years job descriptions and categories have become much tighter. The level of degree that was contained in the practice and exercise of some of these jobs has probably diminished significantly. The argument that might have been in place at one time no longer exists. I also think that at the time these regional pay packages were put in place there was a lot less mobility of labour. We are obviously moving across the country today with a good deal more frequency and efficiency than we did some time ago.

The most important reason to support the motion by the member for Dartmouth is it reflects Canadian values. Many Canadians have lost their faith in this fine institution and in governance in general because they see things that they think should be fixed and which do not get fixed as quickly or as efficiently as they perhaps should. This is one of those things.