

Volunteer Firemen

The last time this issue was discussed I deliberately refrained from making comments so as to allow for a vote to be taken in the allotted one hour that we had. It was the Hon. Member for Mississauga North (Mr. Fisher) who jeopardized the motion at that time.

Since we have more time today, I want to point out some of the concerns that I believe should be taken into account when addressing this measure. I am sure that other Members have also written to the Minister of Finance prior to his Budget proposals to ask him to include this particular measure in the Budget. However, neither the Budget proposals of February or those of April contained any provisions concerning what we had been asking for at that time.

Let me compare the motion which is before us now with the similar motion that was brought forward on December 12, 1983. The motion on December 12, 1983, read:

That in the opinion of this House, the Government should consider the advisability of amending the Income Tax Act to allow volunteer firemen who receive no allowance from a government, municipality, or other public authority, to deduct from their income expenses incurred in the exercise of their duties as volunteer firemen.

Of course, there are a number of similarities with the proposal that had been introduced in the previous session by the Hon. Member for Brampton-Georgetown (Mr. McDermid). There is the request that a greater degree of deductibility be allowed for expenses incurred by volunteer firemen during the course of their duties. The difference between the two proposals is that the one made by the Member for Brampton-Georgetown suggested a limit of some \$1,000 per firemen per year while this motion has no specific limit. We applaud that measure.

I do have some concern with regard to what might be explicitly meant by the word "allowance". As the House knows, some volunteer firemen in some areas receive a small stipend to alleviate the costs somewhat. I hope this matter might be considered in a fair and just manner if it is referred to the committee.

For the benefit of the House, I should mention some of the expenses that volunteer firemen incur during the course of their duties. I have talked to some fire chiefs in my area. My office recently had a conversation with Mr. David Seeley who has just taken over the new fire chief position in Dauphin. He noted that, from his perspective, volunteer firemen are a different breed of people. They give of their time and their talents and of course they even risk their lives. He suggested that it was the least the Government could do to ensure that they did not also have to give continually of their own money as well.

We are aware that the present \$500 that could be given to a volunteer fireman can help somewhat, but let me talk about some of the expenses they incur. For example, in the case of a large constituency such as mine, in which there are 34 municipalities, seven Indian reserves and 12 northern community councils, there is the gas that is required for private vehicles to go to and from fires. The cost of gasoline has gone up and those volunteer firemen pay for it out of their own pockets. As

well, there is the maintenance of these vehicles and the fact that they require various warning lights. These vehicles must be plugged in during the winter, especially in the more northern rural constituencies, so that they are ready to be driven to a fire when the fireman receives a phone call.

In addition, volunteers require protective equipment, such as clothing, helmets and boots. Many of them have to incur also the cost of time lost as a result of not having shown up for work. There are various courses that firemen take. I know that volunteers from my constituency try to upgrade themselves by taking various fire-fighting and first aid courses. They must incur the expense of the travel time that is necessary to take these courses which are held in larger centres. Many of them also want to be constantly informed about some of the latest technologies in fire-fighting and therefore will subscribe to the appropriate magazines. All of these are costs incurred by volunteer firemen.

Let me give one illustration of what it costs a fireman when he must lose time from work, since it is an incident that happened just last week. There was a fire at the Dauphin elementary school that started on Monday night. The volunteer firefighters were at the scene that night, on Tuesday, and were still there on Wednesday morning. As David Seely said, these volunteer firemen in our area are a rare breed. They offer their own talents, time and energy to contribute to this type of volunteer activity.

This does not take place in only one community in my riding. I could mention every part of my riding and show the contribution that volunteer firemen are making there. It does not matter whether you go to a place like Swan River, Roblin, Grandview, Gilbert Plains, Winnipegosis, St. Rose, Ethelbert, McCreary or Minitonas. The reason I am mentioning some of these place names is to give you some idea, Mr. Speaker, of the impact which these volunteer firemen have. I am just talking about locations, but other things could be said in their favour.

● (1720)

How much more time do I have, Mr. Speaker? I understand we are allowed 20 minutes. Do we have until six o'clock, Mr. Speaker? Could I have a little guidance on the matter? I do not think I should cut my speech short if there is more time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the Hon. Member putting a question to the Chair?

Mr. Lewycky: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The debate is allowed to proceed for a full hour, 60 minutes. We will normally adjourn under the Standing Order at six o'clock.

Mr. Lewycky: Thank you for the clarification, Mr. Speaker.

What about the smaller communities up north, such as, for instance, Mafeking? There are great distances between these various towns. We have little towns, for example, like Inglis, Camperville, Amaranth, Benito, Bowsman, Fork River, I am trying to emphasize the importance of a constituency such as