

Volunteer Firemen

it is time to look at the tax exemption and to increase it to \$1,000.

I should like to point out what this would cost the treasury. It will cost approximately \$11 million in lost tax revenue. Just to put that in its perspective, for most of us \$11 million is a lot of money but the Government spends \$9 million in the time that it takes to hold Question Period—\$9 million in 45 minutes. We are asking for a tax exemption which will cost about \$11 million or approximately 55 minutes of expenditure by the present Government. We are not asking for something monumental in terms of this tax deduction.

I think we should sum up the services performed by these volunteers. They risk their lives. They interrupt their day-to-day routines. In some cases they lose pay at their regular jobs each time they answer a fire call. I think it is worthwhile; I doubt that there is a person in Canada who would disagree with that. If the Minister of Finance conducts a survey of every fire marshal or commissioner in Canada, I am certain he would find unanimous approval of such a tax exemption increase.

In summary, I ask for support of this motion by all sides of the House to increase the tax exemption for volunteer firemen to \$1,000 in the next federal Budget, which we expect early in the spring.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss Coline Campbell (South West Nova): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Brampton-Georgetown (Mr. McDermid) was quite correct: I planned to speak this afternoon as soon as I knew that his notice of motion would be before the House. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to speak again on behalf of volunteer firemen, not only in South West Nova but across Nova Scotia and Canada.

I realize that the Hon. Member's motion is to increase the amount allowed under Section 8(1)(b) of the Income Tax Act to \$1,000 for volunteer firemen who receive allowances from a Government, municipality or other public authority. However, in Nova Scotia there are 8,000 firefighters, 7,000 of whom are volunteers. The majority of them receive no allowance at all from a municipal body or any other public authority. In my opinion, the notice of motion of the Hon. Member does not cover volunteers who receive no allowance. We must remember that all volunteer firemen across Canada incur similar expenses. Not only do they incur expenses, but they risk their lives voluntarily and save many lives across the country, as well as save millions of taxpayers' dollars. They do it night or day, winter or summer, and they do it without knowing when they will do it.

As the Hon. Member mentioned, I raised my concerns in this regard in the House last July at which time my notice of motion was debated. I have raised it in the past before with Ministers of Finance as to the need to make a special example of the volunteer firemen because of the special type of work that this volunteer does in Canada. I do sympathize with the need to increase the amount. However, I would like to see us amend the Income Tax Act to include these people. I say this

not to go against the motion because I feel expenses are rightly there, but if they should be increased to \$1,000, so be it. I say this because I feel that this motion does not go far enough or deal with that volunteer fireman who is not entitled to take advantage of Section 8(1)(b), which the Hon. Member wants to amend today.

• (1630)

I raised the matter recently with the present Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) after his appointment because I have been working, as I have said, to have it changed. I wanted to bring my concerns to the new Minister of Finance.

I have a letter from the Minister of Finance dated January 12, 1983 in which again he explains the position of the Government on this matter. I would like to talk about these volunteers. The Department of Finance seems to feel that if we give special status to the volunteer firemen we will be offending other volunteer groups across Canada. I can appreciate that. I can appreciate all the good work that is done by volunteers right across Canada, but I am asking that special status be given to volunteer firemen. Most of us at one time or another have seen the work done by volunteer firemen. Their work includes going to meetings, training, looking for new equipment and, particularly in rural Canada, raising money to run volunteer fire departments. It also includes raising money to buy coats, hats, boots, gloves, or whatever type of clothing they must wear to a fire. They have no choice as to the time a fire takes place. A fire can take place when they are at their normal work. They have to go to the scene of the fire. They have no choice but to go in the clothes they are wearing. They receive no additional recognition if their clothes are destroyed. It is up to them to replace their clothing at their own expense. It seems to me that all Canadians should be aware that for volunteers who do not receive an expense allowance from a municipality this is not provided for in the Income Tax Act. Volunteer firemen cannot deduct expenses like these from their income tax. I feel very strongly about that.

The Minister and his Department have a concern. In his letter to me of January 12, 1983, he writes:

Contributions of money and time in volunteer service is basically personal—

It is a personal decision to be a volunteer. The Minister continues:

—undertaken at a taxpayer's discretion. The related expenses of providing the service are, therefore, personal expenses. Because of the possibility of abuses of tax incentives for personal gains, tax concessions are not generally provided in respect of personal expenses, even when they are expended to earn incomes—

I will accept that. The letter continues:

Given this general tax principle, it would be very difficult to introduce tax benefits for volunteer services that would be fair to the taxpaying public who must ultimately finance these benefits.

The taxpaying public to which the Minister refers is receiving an extra special service from these volunteers who are trained to go out at the risk of their lives to protect property and people in burning buildings. I do not think that the Canadian taxpayers would object if they were asked whether they would mind the deduction being allowed, under Section