

*Government Orders*

for goodness sake. What did it do? This government, to milk a few more dollars, has gone after volunteer fire departments with unconscionable licence fees. Volunteer fire departments are not Liberal, Tories or NDPers. They are people in the communities and they feel very diminished. The minister opposite is nodding, and I hope he can tell his colleagues in cabinet that they should change this foolishness.

On user fees, the government would even hit volunteer fire departments. This means that in some cases there is over a 1000 per cent increase in the fee. A volunteer fire department, whether in Eastern Passage in my riding, or in any other ridings all over the country, has to raise its money. It gets a little bit of a fee from the municipality, but it has to hold bean suppers and fall fairs so that it can purchase equipment to protect the people in the community. What the government does is say work a little harder because it is going to charge a licence fee for every piece of communications equipment they have, not just one fee to cover the fire department, every single fee.

We started a petition drive. Every fire department in the country that I have been in touch with has indicated that these fees are not only regressive, but that they have been misled. In 1986, a very honourable member, the former member for Kingston and the Islands, said, as reported in *Hansard*, that the volunteer fire departments would be exempt. Again, because of user fees, the government thinks it can go in because there is nothing sacred. It does not matter if there is a fire department in some far-flung reach of this great nation that may have to forgo purchasing a new piece of equipment. Do not forget that they do not have bank accounts. They have to raise their money. Mostly, volunteer fire departments are in poor municipalities. These people are doing their part. For God's sake, the least the government can do with user fees is keep its hands out of their pockets.

I have talked to members opposite who have said the same thing. If there is one thing that the government could do to show that it has a little bit of compassion and understands how the country operates and the important contribution of volunteers like firemen and firewomen right across the country, is to say it made a mistake. It should live by the word and the commitment of the

former Minister of Communications and withdraw those fees. That is what it should do.

Every fireman, fire department or individual watching this tonight should write to their member of Parliament and tell them that. More particularly, they should write to the ministers on the front benches. It is one of those small things when you talk about user fees. It is easy to say it will only cost a few bucks. But when looking at the potential damage to get that few extra bucks, it could be a little bit more financially responsible and ingenious on that side of the House. The few dollars the government will pick up on that may result in a slower response to an emergency in a community. It should withdraw the fee. That is why I have a little bit of a problem with the user fees.

I used to think that democracy worked in a certain way, that no matter if a government came in with a piece of legislation, if it saw that for whatever reason there was a flaw in it, it would change it. The government has developed a siege mentality when it comes to this type of initiative and it simply will not do it.

We on this side of the House are going to continue. I will be up every day, if I have to, presenting petitions from volunteer fire departments until the government comes to its senses and realizes there are certain things that cannot be touched and cannot be milked from the country because of its financial irresponsibility and mismanagement.

The last thing deals with transportation and infrastructure generally, user fees again. We have seen the government, with its quest for the bottom line, dismantle many pieces of the national infrastructure. Well, we do not all live in a Toronto, or Hamilton, or Vancouver, or even Halifax. Some of us have to live in other beautiful parts of the country where we do not perhaps have infrastructure that supports itself.

I talked a little bit earlier about the principle of equalization. It is enshrined in our Constitution—it is there. It means that the government, the people in the country, believe that we have to make level playing-fields, that there is a cost in keeping this nation together. It does not mean that we squander our money, but it