

Bill S-203 – National Philanthropy Day

10/21/2010

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill S-203. The history of this bill goes back a ways.

For a number of years, Senator Jerry Grafstein and Senator Mercer have been working on producing this bill so that we can officially make November 15 philanthropy day in Canada. Both senators have a long history of philanthropic involvement, community involvement, and giving back to the community. They worked very hard at this.

In the last House it was S-217. It passed the Senate. It came to this place, and we moved it through the House. Then, and after prorogation it died and came back as S-203. It went to the Senate again, and I intended to bring it forward. As the member from Peace River said, he scrambled a bit and brought it forward.

The bottom line is that we now have an opportunity to come together as a Parliament and get this bill through.

It is important. It matters to many people. Like everyone in the House, I guess, I have been involved in a lot of not-for-profit organizations. I have been the President of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia, and I have served on the national board. I have worked with literacy, food banks, junior achievement, CNIB, and a number of organizations. We come to meet some fabulous people who give an awful lot to their communities.

When I travel in my own community, I am constantly amazed at the dedicated work that people do every day, like the people who gather in a church in the north end of Dartmouth every Wednesday to provide food to the poor. There are people like Doris McArcher, who has a clothing depot in a church in Dartmouth, where she collects clothes for people who need them. She does not ask them if they need help. In the winter, she provides the coats, pants, scarves, and hats because she knows that if people come to get her help it is because they need it.

A lot of faith-based people are doing this kind of work. They do this in the belief that God would want them to. There are people who do not believe in God who also do this kind of work. Whatever the motivation, these good people should be recognized.

In my own life, I have two active children who play hockey and soccer. They paddle on the great lakes in Dartmouth--Cole Harbour. My daughter is in Brownies, tennis, and golf. Even at the school, it is important to have volunteers because of the crisis in funding these days. None of these things would be possible without people who would coach, manage, and do the kinds of things that make it possible for kids to enjoy the activities that we want them to be part of.

In the church I go to, there are people like my wife who teach Sunday school, there are people in the choir, and there are people who fill other roles. These are all philanthropic acts and they are important.

We should never diminish the importance of people who give money. It is so important to give to those who do not have. My sister is involved in the Association of Fundraising Professionals. She is a fundraiser with the Canadian Cancer Society and is involved in AFP organizations like Imagine Canada, which is helping to build the philanthropic sector.

We know that recent times have been challenging. An Imagine Canada report from last August quotes a few statistics on the difficulties that charities are facing. For example, more than half of charities are experiencing increased demand for their products and services. Compared with 2009, more charities are reporting that they are at risk, experiencing increased demand, or both. The percentage of charities under high stress has increased to 17%. The financial situation of many charities has stagnated or deteriorated slightly. On average, charities report that revenues have dropped by 1.1%, while expenditures have risen by almost 4%.

It is always a challenge to get people to work in the not-for-profit sector, but now it is particularly difficult. Operating charities report that the average number of paid staff has decreased by 4.4%. In spite of the challenges, however, the level of confidence is high.

As a group, charity leaders are remarkably confident in the future, because the people who work in charities, in the not-for-profit sector, are optimistic people. They see the challenges but they do not shy away from them. They see the obstacles, but they decide that they are going to overcome them.

I think that this is an important thing. My colleague from Peace River spoke about growing up in his family. In my own family, which was a large, kind of boisterous family, we belonged to the Foster Parents Plan. We would make our donations, and we would write letters back and forth to understand what was happening with children in other parts of the world who were not quite so fortunate.

It is interesting to look at who gives money in Canada. It is not always people in big cities. It is not always people with deep pockets. Quite often it is people in places like Cape Breton, Nova Scotia and Pictou County. Some of the people one would think are not doing well economically are the ones who pitch in and help. It is part of the ethic of growing up in a small community. It is the old ethic of pitching in and helping out. If somebody's house is on fire, the place is rebuilt. If somebody needs help, a bake sale is held. The spirit of giving that seems to exist in many parts of small-town Canada carries on today.

There is no question that there are challenges in the fundraising sector for the not-for-profit organizations. People who raise money, like Peter Bessey from Scotiabank, who is heading up a campaign for the Canadian Cancer Society in Nova Scotia, face certain challenges. We have the power in this place to recognize these people. We can use the power that comes with being a member of Parliament. We know that what these people do matters. We know that what they do builds a better country. It is important that we

take the opportunity, like the one that presents itself in Bill S-203, to recognize the people who build a better world.

Earlier this year, I had the chance to speak here about a woman named Ruth Goldbloom, who was the driving force behind Pier 21. My leader, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, had a chance to go to Pier 21. He had a chance to connect with relatives in his past. Pier 21 would not have happened if Ruth Goldbloom had not been the driving force. Ruth recognizes that all the people who have worked at Pier 21 are important, whether they have given \$1 million, as seven people have, or whether they work in the gift shop to help people when they visit Pier 21. She believes that all these people deserve to be recognized.

The voluntary sector in Canada is huge and it cannot be replaced by paid work. It cannot be replaced by people who do things professionally. It cannot be replaced because there is not the commitment, the optimism, and the sheer dedication that happens in the voluntary sector in Canada. It is incumbent upon this House to recognize the people who do that work and in some way tell them that we appreciate them.

I am looking at an article in the Toronto *Star* entitled "Women are Changing the Face of Philanthropy". The article refers to the hon. Margaret Norrie McCain, who is a great philanthropist in Nova Scotia. I will quote from this article:

Many women today use their influence to give more strategically, and in different ways, than men or women did in the past....They have adopted new models, such as giving circles, to bring like-minded donors together to pool their resources in support of a common cause. "Women give to organizations that they have some connection with," says Maria Antonakos of Opus Philanthropic Strategies Inc.

Philanthropy has been around a long time in many different ways at many different levels. But it does change. It does reflect the marketplace. When we have a recession, as we have had over the last couple of years and continue to have, it hurts, and it disproportionately hurts organizations that deal with those people who need the most help.

We should recognize the work that people do. We should recognize those who give in small ways, but also the people who give big money, like those in my own community: the Risleys, the Rowes, the O'Regans, the Fountains, the Goldblooms, the Sobey's, the Jodeys, the Keatings, the McFees and Smithers, the Conrad family, the Spatsis, the Flemings, the Edwards, and the Dennis family, who own the Chronicle Herald.

These are the people who build Canada. Their work cannot be replaced. It is not about financially rewarding the people who are raising money. It is incumbent upon us and the Parliament of Canada to tell them that we understand what they do, we know it is important, we know it builds a better country. It builds a better community for all of us. We want to say thanks by making November 15 philanthropy day in Canada. I urge all members to support this bill.