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MINISTRY OF FISHERIES, OCEANS AND THE CANADIAN COAST GUARD

STAFFING AT LIGHTHOUSES

Question by:

The Honourable Patricia Bovey

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

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Hon. Patricia Bovey: Thank you, minister, for being here today. My question is with regard to Canada's staffing of lighthouses and the conditions of those who work in the 50 staffed lighthouses. Their jobs are important and complex, and their eyes on the water have proven to be critical for marine traffic safety, for life saving and emergencies, for tracking and warning of illicit activity and for monitoring large sea mammals.

Lighthouse keepers' days are long: 11 hours every day, seven days a week. They're on call 24 hours a day, and many have had holidays denied in the last several years as there are no backups. Now many are on stress leave.

Minister, why is the department acting slowly, and in some cases not at all, in filling vacancies? Why do we not have the backup so people can take their well-earned breaks? Why is the Coast Guard leaving some of the 50 lighthouses, which were promised to be staffed, unstaffed, at least temporarily?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson, P.C., M.P., Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard: Thank you very much for the question. It's an important question.

Canada's staffed lighthouses play an iconic role in our organization and the protection of our coastline. They are organizational, functional and sustainable, and they have been serving the marine community for more than a century.

The position of the lighthouse keeper is an incredible adventure: remote areas, few people, travel by boat or helicopter, and living on the cusp of the beautiful and powerful ocean. But it is not a job for everyone, which can make it difficult to staff.

It is a remote lifestyle with limited access to others both physically and electronically.

Over the past year, as is happening in many sectors of the Canadian work force, there have been a number of retirements within the lighthouse keeper community who staff many of our light stations. The Coast Guard has been planning in advance of these retirements and actively working to attract and recruit the next generation of lighthouse keepers.

Currently there are 51 staffed light stations in Canada which require 113 lightkeeper positions. Some lightkeepers work on a rotational schedule while others live at the light stations permanently. The Canadian Coast Guard has an active recruitment strategy under way. However, currently we are experiencing some shortfalls with staffing.

We have conducted a survey among lighthouse keeper communities to come up with new, innovative ideas on how to recruit and retain the next generation of lighthouse keepers. You can find the Coast Guard at job fairs, recruitment sessions, online job banks and social media doing the same thing.

We believe in the continued viability of lighthouses and keepers. We are deploying our recruitment know-how to ensure these Canadian icons representing marine safety, the promise of getting home, and a light in the darkness continue to act as more than a symbol. They are a functional and necessary component in fulfilling our mandate to keep Canada's waterways and the people who navigate them safe.
