

*Private Members' Business*

I will make my remarks brief. I rise to speak in support of Bill C-309. It is a pleasure to do so. I believe reform of the Access to Information Act is very necessary and long overdue. My feeling on Bill C-309 is that while I support it wholeheartedly, it does not go anywhere near far enough. The time has come, in the name of opening up government, in the name of opening up the bureaucracy, to review the provisions of the Access to Information Act.

I have had a lot of experience with the Access to Information Act over the years, particularly in the matter of getting historic records. As the member for Broadview—Greenwood said, the act as originally designed is not the act as it is currently practised. We have a situation where an act that was originally intended to open up government documents is now being used in many instances to withhold government documents.

I want to say to the member for Red Deer that I join him in supporting this bill and putting this bill forward. I hope it is a first step for a complete overhaul of both the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act.

• (1150)

**Mr. Mike Scott (Skeena, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize the individuals on the other side who are supporting this bill. I would like to ask those members who do not support the bill why they do not support it. Why did we not have unanimous consent to have this bill made a votable bill?

When these people were in opposition to the Conservatives they ripped at the Conservatives all the time. They said we have to change the access to information laws, open government up, and let Canadian taxpayers, who are footing the bill for this information, have access to it. Why the change of heart once the Liberal Party was elected as government? Why the difference?

I think the fundamental reason for that lies at the very heart of what is wrong with our approach to governing in this country. It is because we have among the three old-line parties an elitist, top down approach to governing. Once the political party of the day gets into power it is not much interested in listening to the people in the sense of shaping policy or developing legislation. It is very much a command and control government that we have. It wants to have information so that it knows how to shape its messages and sell its policies but it is not really interested in having policy developed or shaped by the Canadian people. In this milieu, it is not particularly helpful to have information available to the public. It is much more advantageous to keep that information to yourself and use it for your own purposes and not allow the Canadian people to have access to it.

I would use the gun control bill as a perfect example of a bill that is widely hated by Canadians. The government is refusing to acknowledge that fact. It is using polling as a means of trying to determine how it can best sell this odious piece of legislation. It

is not really interested in listening to the views of Canadians from coast to coast who take real offence to this legislation.

I would make the argument that the situation we find ourselves in is not likely to change. We will have opposition parties forever decrying the lack of access to information and ridiculing and condemning the government of the day for not changing the access to information rules. However, once these parties get into power they will act the same way unless we have a fundamental change in our whole approach to governing.

That is what the Reform Party of Canada stands for. We believe that not only do we come here with a set of policies and principles we would like to put in front of the Canadian people, but we also suggest there has to be a fundamental change in the way Canada is governed. Ordinary Canadians should have much more say through referenda, through initiatives, and through recall to have their views and wishes incorporated into the policies and legislation of the government.

Until we have these fundamental changes, until we have a break away from this elitist, top down approach to government in which information is always going to be very tightly corralled, where there is no advantage in making that information known to the general public, we are never going to have the changes we would all like to see. I would suggest that while the members opposite talk about opening this up and having better access to information, it is not going to change until we change the system.

• (1155)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Seeing no other members rising, I wonder if the House might be disposed to this. The motion stands in the name of the hon. member for Red Deer. The understanding is that no one else will speak after the hon. member for Red Deer closes the debate. I would seek the member's co-operation, if he would reply under the right of reply for two minutes and no more, to in fact close the debate on Motion No. M-309 which stands in his name.

**Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, what we have heard is a general agreement that the access to information legislation needs to be reformed. I would like to believe there is an honest will to do that and that the justice minister will deliver on the promise to change the legislation.

The problem is there are a lot of issues on the justice minister's plate and I honestly do not believe he will get around to the changes in the legislation or will be able to deal with them in this Parliament. For those of us in the House who believe there should be changes, I believe that the onus is on us to continue to bring forward these ideas and the desire of the Canadian people to have more openness in government. The people are demanding it. They are saying that it must happen. I believe that we as parliamentarians must respond. I would urge all members to get behind the changes and to pressure their parties to make these changes.