• (1400)

You would have a situation in which he would be investigating but we, the parliamentarians, would not be able to see a full and candid report.

Therefore I really urge the committee to look very carefully at the implications of these two acts, the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act, and make sure that however it is done the ethics counsellor is able to report as fully as possible on his findings before this House.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I want to acknowledge that the bill entitled An Act to amend the Lobbyists Registration Act is a step in the right direction. It imposes additional requirements on lobbyists and provides the public with a better understanding of the role they play.

This bill is, however, nothing but a watered-down version of the red book commitment to implement the June 1993 report of the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Operations respecting the review of the Lobbyists Registration Act.

What kind of promises were contained in the red book? The first commitment made was to eliminate the distinction between Tier I and Tier II lobbyists. The government has not followed up on this undertaking, which means that there will continue to be two categories of lobbyists to whom different rules apply. Yet, the Liberal members were the ones who demanded that the distinction be dropped during the discussions on the registration of lobbyists in the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Operations.

Here is what the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell had to say about this matter on February 2, 1993: "There is a concern about the in-house lobbyists, about the fact that we are not asking as much information from them as from others; namely, we are not asking the topic about which they are lobbying. Does this not make it easy for someone to hire a Tier I lobbyist and merely put him on the payroll? In other words, you convert him into a Tier II and you put him on the payroll for a year because you know this person will be lobbying for the drug patents act or some other controversial topic, for example. By putting him or her on the payroll, you effectively reduce the information that you have to divulge".

The second commitment made was to establish a code of ethics governing conflict-of-interest situations involving public figures, for example, members of Parliament or Cabinet and senior officials. The government has only partly fulfilled this particular commitment since it has not given this future code regulatory status, which would have made it more legally binding. Therefore, any attempt to deceive will be met merely with a reprimand, not with legal or criminal sanctions. This government is harder on young offenders than on friends of the system and the parliamentarians who are at their beck and call.

A third promise made in the red book was to eliminate tax deductions for lobbying expenses. Canadians must realize that they have elected 295 members of Parliament to represent them and that day after day, opposition members question the government in the hope of getting answers which, when they do come, are only partial, while Parliament Hill bustles with 2,800 lobbyists who call the shots with taxpayers' money. Let us recall the role played by lobbyists in what has come to be known as the Ginn Publishing and Pearson Airport scandals. In his report on the latter scandal, Mr. Nixon noted that the lobbyists played a prominent part in attempting to affect the decisions that were reached, going far beyond the acceptable norms of "consulting". That is totally unacceptable.

Also, nothing in this bill provides for lobbying expenses to be made public, even as part of an inquiry. Yet, such information is extremely useful in assessing the activities of lobbyists. On that subject, the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell stated on February 23, 1993: "I do not agree that knowing how much is spent on lobbying is of interest neither to those involved nor to the public". In the case of the Pearson scandal, it is in the public interest to know who are the lobbyists who worked on that deal and how much they were paid to do it. It is even more important because in this case as in many others, former high-ranking government officials are now selling their knowledge of the inner workings of government and using their former contacts. It is the revolving door approach.

• (1405)

In the case of Pearson Airport, the scandal is overwhelming. On the one hand, lobbying fees were deducted from the taxes paid by the corporations involved in the attempted privatization of Pearson Airport, and on the other, taxpayers will be hit a second time since, under clause 10 of Bill C-22, those corporations will be compensated.

Still on the issue of lobbying fees, the government allows conditional fees to be paid by people who hire lobbyists if and when they succeed in getting certain favours from the government for their client, such as a contract, for instance. On February 16, 1993, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell stated very clearly, and I quote: "I believe that conditional fees should be banned".

The fourth undertaking in the red book was to reveal the players in the government decision-making process by asking various questions, for example: Who could be influenced? Which lobbyist requested a meeting with which minister? Which public servant met with which lobbyist to discuss which issue? What was the particular item on the agenda, or what issue did the parties discuss? Was it a bill, an amendment, a subsidy, a