

Government Orders

Having reviewed the bill before us, I submit that this bill would have been of no use to us in getting to the bottom of the Pearson Airport scandal.

As you can see, this bill is seriously flawed. I will try to describe briefly the flaws I see in this bill and explain how I would like to contribute to future debates on this bill.

Flaw number one: the ethics counsellor is appointed by the Governor in Council, in other words, the government, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, as in the case of Mr. Nixon, who was appointed to investigate the Pearson Airport deal. I would say his being appointed by the government undermines his authority. As I see it, he should have been appointed by the House of Commons, just like the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. This gives him unquestioned prestige and authority.

• (1305)

Flaw number two: the code of conduct is not a statutory instrument. This code, as described in the bill, seems to be little more than a pious wish list. Lobbyists are advised to behave in a certain way, but the code is not a statutory instrument. This is going to make it difficult for the person responsible for its application to summon witnesses, to question their statements, to shed light on suspicious deals. I think the non-regulatory status of the ethics code is a major weakness of the bill before us.

Another shortcoming is that lobbyists are not required to make public the amounts involved. When a lobbyist receives \$10,000 for his services, I think he is not in the same situation as if he received \$1 million or \$2 million.

The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who spoke before me, said that he thought of disclosing the amounts paid to lobbyists. The argument he just put forward to justify his change of mind is that there would be so much information that it would be impractical for potential lobbying researchers to dig out the figures. I think the hon. member changed his mind a little too fast because of an apparently flimsy justification. Whether there are 5,000 or 10,000 reports, Canadians interested in democracy will make an effort to look at them. Whether there are 10 or 20 people looking, if they see problems, they will be able to warn the population, and I think journalists will be smart enough to use this information. I think it would be important to know how much lobbyists received for their services.

Another element of the bill that has not been pointed out but should be in my opinion—I will be told, I am sure, that it has to do with the Income Tax Act or with other tax laws—is that the government has kept the tax deduction for lobbyists' fees. It is somewhat ironic that, on the one hand, the public is denied this information and that, on the other hand, since the people who

hire lobbyists benefit by being allowed to claim a tax deduction, this information is provided to the Department of Revenue.

It could be said that lobbyists want to have their cake and eat it too. It means that when things are not favourable, they want to keep it a secret, but when they can benefit financially, there is no problem as long as tax confidentiality is preserved. I think that this tax deduction is very questionable, especially since President Clinton of the United States, who wants to regulate lobbying, is thinking of eliminating it.

The bill also makes a dubious distinction between two types of lobbyists: consultant lobbyists paid to make representations on behalf of their clients and in-house corporate lobbyists whose main duty is to lobby departments and governments in order to obtain benefits for their companies. The bill is tougher on consultant lobbyists than on in-house lobbyists.

• (1310)

But we must say that in-house lobbyists are often employed by large corporations which can afford their services and which must be accountable to the public. So I think that the lack of uniformity in the way this bill treats the various lobbyists is a major weakness which may bring the public to question the effectiveness of this bill.

Another feature I find particularly surprising is that lobbyists are not required to name the people they contacted in the agencies concerned. A report might say: "So-and-so contacted the Department of Transport, the Department of Human Resources or the Department of Justice". But we would like to know whom this person contacted. Was it the minister or a senior official? I think that it is important to find out what went on and to shed light on lobbying activities.

I shall conclude because my time is almost up. Basically, Quebecers and Canadians want to know who is lobbying. They want to know for whom the lobbying is done. They want to know how the lobbying is done. They want to know why the lobbying is done and how much it costs. I think that it is important and when the principle of this bill is considered, my party will seek to ensure that this law has all the necessary provisions so that the people of Canada and Quebec are kept informed of lobbyists' activities.

[English]

Mr. David Iftody (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the government's motion to send this bill, an act to amend the Lobbyists Registration Act, to the committee prior to second reading.

No Canadian requires the services of a lobbyist to approach this government. I am sure that all members of this House would agree that our doors are always open to our constituents and we