

*Private Members' Business*

What all this leads to is the conclusion that while change is necessary and desirable and while reform is required, the appropriate body and authority to carry out those reforms is the royal commission on electoral reform. It was appointed on November 15, 1989 and involved five members of acknowledged abilities and expertise. They have held, as I said, public hearings. I think their conclusions will provide a basis for the changes that will enhance the elections law of Canada and improve the Canada Elections Act.

We all know that not only members of the House of Commons have commented unfavourably on the current provisions, but the Chief Electoral Officer in 1986 suggested the need for changes in the definition of elections expenses. That was repeated after the last federal election in 1988. I think we can all agree that change is necessary and required, but we cannot agree on this very day on what is the process by which those changes are made and the ultimate result of that process which would be the new provisions to be placed in the elections act defining election expenses.

Other members of the House in their presentations pointed out the correlation of election expenses to limits on election expenditures. If we are going to give a broad definition of election expenses we have to consider the impact of that definition on the total limitation of election expenses. I think that everyone involved in election campaigning will tend to agree that the better course is a lower limit on election expenses. It is the higher limits that can lead to poor practices in the course of campaigning.

In the case of my own constituency of Halifax West in the province of Nova Scotia, it encompasses five or more provincial constituencies. Each one of those provincial constituencies permits electoral expenses greater than the whole of the federal constituency of Halifax West.

In 1988 when a federal election took place in November—it was called after a provincial election took place in September 1988—I was faced with party workers who had acted under electoral expense rules five times as generous, if generosity is the right choice of word, as the federal limit. We had to tell people constantly that we could not provide elaborate signs and that we could not provide the written material, the printed matter that was available in provincial elections.

My clear conclusion from that experience is that the provincial election limits in Nova Scotia—and I cannot speak for any other part of the country—are far too high. That in turn involves large-scale collections in the course of a campaign. It involves too many people contributing too much money to an election campaign. That is what gives rise to public concern for mischief in the political systems.

We would do ourselves a service and we would do the people of Canada a service if we carefully reviewed the recommendations of the royal commission on electoral reform that I am sure will relate to the matter of election expenses, the definition of those election expenses, what ought to be encompassed in the definition, and what limits ought to be placed on election expenses.

If we follow that careful process, we will benefit not only the electoral process of the House of Commons but the whole Canadian electoral system.

• (1800 )

**Mr. Geoff Wilson (Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia):** Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure for me to rise and speak in this debate concerning Bill C-283, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act, as has been put by my hon. friend from Churchill.

In speaking to it I would very much want to associate myself with the remarks made by my colleague from Halifax who just spoke. I noted the remarks made by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands. I believe he indicated that he viewed this bill as a small step toward a needed larger package of electoral reforms. I feel that, given the proximity of the report of the royal commission which is busy studying electoral reform, this House would be well advised to wait until that report has been received.

The issues raised by the hon. member's bill are being considered by the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, which was established in mid-November of 1989. Five commissioners were appointed under the Inquiries Act to inquire into and report on the appropriate principles and process that should govern the election of members of the House of Commons and the financing of political parties and of candidates' campaigns.