

Motions

consult with members of the lobbying industry to discuss the formation of an association of lobbyists in addition to a system of registration. As we said in our report, that would put responsibility for the day to day conduct of the lobbying industry squarely where it belongs, on the industry itself.

Earlier in my comments I referred to the fact that the vast majority of people are clear-thinking, honest and sincere. We want to encourage them.

I see you are giving me a signal that my time is fast running out, Mr. Speaker. I thought I had until about 12.07. Do I have a few more minutes? Then I can make a few more comments. I know the speech is fascinating the whole House.

An Hon. Member: Especially the galleries.

Mr. Cooper: The galleries are really enjoying it. I know the press is watching it with great interest, so I am glad I have a few more minutes.

One of the most important and also most difficult things we had to do in the committee was to come up with a definition of a lobbyist. That is probably at the root of all the work we did. If we had made a mistake in that area, it would have tainted or soured the entire report. What we recommended essentially is that lobbying be defined as attempting to influence either directly or indirectly any Government decision. Let me deal with direct and indirect influence. Direct influence is in the one on one context. Another area becoming quite significant is the indirect category, which is developing in the United States and it seems to be a trend starting here in Canada. I speak of political action committees. They are very sophisticated, highly financed and highly organized lobbying groups that are having a tremendous impact on public policy and decisions. They have traditionally fallen out of the net that would normally be included in a registration of lobbyists, hence our reason for adding the word "indirectly". That point I feel is very important for the Department to pick out from the report.

● (1200)

Included in government decisions are category regulations, laws, policies and contracts. All of those are significant public activity having a direct impact on the Canadian taxpayer and we believe that they should be included in any definition. We recommended that, for the purpose of registration, a lobbyist be defined generally to include anyone who, for compensation—that would either include a person on salary or having a contract—engages in lobbying activities as we have defined them, directed at the executive—and this is very important flowing out of the American experience—the bureaucracy or Members of the House of Commons or Senate or their staff. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we have tried to make sure that we dealt with the Canadian reality and did not mimic the American experience, which we felt had really created a number of holes and opportunities to evade the system of registration.

The information we required was really very simple. My friend, the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt, as always with his wonderful way with words, described it very well. We want to know who is doing what, to whom and on what issue, and, as he said, to add for how much. But that is basically it. We wanted to know who the lobbyists are lobbying for or who they are representing and we wanted to know what issue the lobbyists were dealing with. We felt that if those three basic principles were made public in reality, you would have the nuts and bolts of the information that Canadians need to see what kinds of activities are going on and thus get that sense of openness and freedom that is important.

I touched earlier on the administration of the system and how important it was that it not be viewed as a large bureaucracy. We recommended that the Assistant Deputy Registrar General be charged with the responsibility of administering the registry. I want to emphasize again that we should not have a large bureaucracy or one that would require a great deal of expense or one that is complex.

I want to deal with what is happening from here on. The committee worked on the issue for a year. We struggled through it, we found it complex, difficult and we heard a lot of witnesses. We did a little travelling, and we have come up with a report that I think has been well received. It is a balanced report. Over the last couple of weeks I have received mail from a wide variety of people, the Canadian public, lobbyists, lawyers and so on who have indicated to me how pleased they are with the report. They see it as a step in the right direction. Well, what happens from here?

The Minister for Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andre) is with us in the House today. I am pleased to see him here because it demonstrates his interest in the subject. He is the one responsible for what will happen from now on. We as a committee asked the Minister's Department to draft some legislation flowing out of our report and then to refer it back to our committee. The reason for that is very simple. We want to see that the legislation flowing out of our report is consistent with it. No one is looking for a mirror image, but we are looking for the basic principles that we feel are important. After that, we would ask that the legislation come back to the House and be passed quickly.

A very important part of the report is that the whole issue be checked again in 2 years' time. The issue is complex and we are charting new territory. It is important to review the results, problems and pitfalls that may develop over the next couple of years. This will give us a chance to clean up whatever discrepancies or problems may have been created by the process.

After having talked to the Minister on a couple of occasions and in talking to as many people as I can, my sense is that the Department is giving this report a high priority and that it will be working very quickly to get the matter into a Bill. Further, my indications are that we will be dealing with it again in this House not too far into the future.