

*Canada Elections Act*

the same privileges which exist for rural voters should be transferred to urban voters and urban voting stations. If these people, rural voters, are away during the time of the enumeration, they should still be sworn in and able to be put on the list. These things are forgotten three years after the event. I cite those examples as the most obvious.

This present Bill, Mr. Speaker, has a special purpose. I feel that it is time we made better provisions for the disabled, the handicapped, the aged and the shut-in so that they might vote.

There is one other category which I feel I should include, and that is the person who is in an emergency situation. If they are taken to the hospital because of an accident or because of sudden illness and they are deprived of their vote because they did not vote during the advance poll, they should have that opportunity. The proxy vote provision I believe is generally acknowledged as a complete mess and a failure. It does not work. I suggest, therefore, Mr. Speaker, that this particular Bill is intended to deal with that situation.

I tried the same idea once before back in 1976 after my second election. It appeared as Bill C-336. The subject matter was referred to committee where it was discussed. I have now been through four elections. On that earlier occasion I had been through only two and was perhaps not as conversant with the manner of dealing with a subject matter of that sort in Committee. However, if the subject matter of this Bill could be referred to Committee, which I would be very happy to see happen, I would be much better prepared to defend what I am intending to do through this Bill before that committee.

The last time I was before the committee on this subject I heard some of the most extraordinary rationalizations trotted out by a number of Hon. Members as to why this particular notion is not practical. What I am intending to do in this Bill, Mr. Speaker, in its simplest terms is to bring the ballot box to those who have difficulty getting out on voting day, for whatever reason.

● (1240)

The regulations for working out such a system should not be too complicated. We already have over 100 rules in the Canada Elections Act, falling into two categories under Appendix A and Appendix B. Another one or two rules to deal with mobile polling stations could be inserted without too much difficulty. Of course, the rules would have to deal with the security measures required to make sure that the ballot boxes are properly looked after at all times. That is done in any event by the polling clerk and scrutineers who should accompany the mobile van.

How do we ensure that those who vote by this method are struck off the voters' list in the place they would normally vote, so that second votes do not take place? I think that is very important and can be done. This Bill does not deal with the particulars of the manner of notification of a desire to make use of the mobile voting station. It might be two weeks or three weeks advance notice. When might the mobile poll be taken? Well, for example, on the days of the advance poll, or even a

week prior to voting day. It might be two or three weeks prior, once the voters' list is stabilized.

How are the votes to be counted and distributed to the various constituencies where they belong once they have been deposited in the ballot box? Of course, there will have to be provision for the write-in vote because, as was suggested in the last committee hearing, it would be quite impossible that there be a collection of printed ballots for Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver. They are huge cities with several hospitals, for example, where the mobile poll would go and there would be people in those hospitals from several constituencies. I think there must be a method whereby, once the ballots are collected, they be distributed to the appropriate balloting station.

What service then is to be offered? To my mind, Mr. Speaker, the mobile poll should on appropriate notification call at hospitals as well as extended care facilities or nursing homes for the elderly. Even individual homes for individual voters. The proof of the need for the service can be dealt with, of course, in the regulations.

As has already been mentioned, provision will have to be made for advance notice of this particular need.

There have been many arguments put forward against this idea and that polls can even now be installed in hospitals. Well, all hospitals are not prepared to have these comings and goings. For example, a minimum of 25 people is required in order to have a poll installed in a hospital. The polling boxes are taken around from bed to bed. That is fair enough and that can be done. But if it can be done that way, I do not see why it cannot be done with a mobile poll. Having a separate polling station there to which the general public in the surrounding area might attend I think is not a very practical solution because of the unwanted and unneeded traffic withing a hospital. This applies to extended care facilities and nursing homes as well. I do not think they are prepared to put up with that sort of thing. So that many of the arguments advanced during the hearings I felt were trifling.

I think we should also bear in mind that there is provision in a number of provincial Elections Acts for this very matter. In Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba, if I remember correctly, there is provision within the Elections Act for mobile polling stations. If it can work provincially, I see no reason why it cannot work federally.

As to notification of the person's home riding once he has voted in a mobile polling station, I think that is a very simple matter. Alexander Graham Bell is pretty well known in this country. There was some mention in one of the hearings that when you get to a hospital in a border area you might have people from another Province voting in that hospital. Still, that can be dealt with. Constituencies do stop at provincial borders, true, but there is a means of contacting the polling officer even in another Province. That comment notwithstanding, I suggest the facility is probably more useful within an urban context than in a rural context.

The write-in ballot provisions may have to be taken into account because, as I say, it would not be easy to have the