

Private Members' Business

I say that not only because we need to clean up our elections act but because of the attitude that is out there in the public at the present time. We know the kerfuffle that has existed with regard to conflict of interest legislation. We know that with regard to the Parliament of Canada Act, there is a perception that we do not pass legislation which enacts against the interests of members of Parliament. I see members in this House who sat on that committee. That is the perception. And I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, that the publicity that came out of the committee that looked into the Marcel Masse affair created that same type of atmosphere.

Here is an opportunity regarding conflict of interest which one of the members in the House—a Conservative member to be fair—raised in statements today. The disclosure of our expenses is an area where members of Parliament can help to clean up the reputation of Parliament. I would hope that members from all sides would take that approach.

I am not saying that this legislation is perfect. I said that earlier. But I think it is a step in the right direction. I know that members in this House who have sat on committees looking at the Elections Act and others who have appeared, including my colleague from the Liberal Party, before the royal commission know that this is an area that we have to act upon. To be fair to the Liberal representative, I believe that he has introduced similar legislation in the House of Commons and that the Liberal Party in a well thought out section of its brief to the commission basically plagiarized my private member's bill. At least I admit that.

I want to say that obviously this is not a partisan approach. I and representatives of other parties have gone before the royal commission to say this is what we need. I do not believe that it would be in the public interest or in the interest of Parliament or in the interest of any of us to go into another federal election with the definition of election expenses that does not hold any water.

It would be quite ironic if a member for Trinity—Spadina living well within the limits of the present election expenses spent \$50,000 and was below the limit of that particular riding but at the same time was in a position to spend \$40,000, \$50,000, \$80,000 or \$100,000 beyond that on items that are not considered to be election expenses.

If my constituency or any other one spends \$150,000 in an election campaign, that should be declared. That is the only fair way of dealing with it. Perhaps there are some items that should be excluded. Perhaps it could be money for the disabled. Perhaps it could be money for child care. Perhaps in large ridings like my own there should be an exemption for some of the candidates' travel costs. They should be included in terms of expenditures, but we understand that they are also costs which we may decide that in fairness should be excluded. These exclusions could be for the handicapped or for child care for women who might be going into politics. We do believe that the vast majority of items which are used in the regular ongoing activity of an election must be declared and must be subject to the legislation which was passed in the early 1970s.

To do otherwise just creates the suspicion that we really do not care, that we have passed legislation and made sure that such legislation has existed to benefit only us, and that we want legislation which is so loose that parties can spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on polling and not have to declare it, so that we can spend money.

One of the ironic situations in the legislation as it is now drafted and has been interpreted is we can basically hire every voter in our riding to work for us for \$10 on election day. As long as that is less than the minimum wage it is not an election expense.

Some people might find that suspicious. Under the interpretation, if we give an honorarium to someone to work election day and it is less than two-thirds of the minimum wage of that province times that number of hours of work, it is considered to be just kind of covering the expenses of a volunteer worker. It is a wonderful formula.

We have some very large loopholes in our elections act. Rather than encouraging people to use their imagination to abuse the system, let us pass legislation which shows that we in the House of Commons are concerned that elections be clean and fair and that the rules under which we conduct elections are honest and easily understood. Let us make it so that ordinary Canadians know exactly what the rules are and whether or not we are playing by those rules. To do otherwise I think works in the worst interests of all of us.