

*Supply*

It being six o'clock, I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

## AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

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## BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

## ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 58—RIGHT TO VOTE IN A FEDERAL ELECTION

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Broadbent:

That this House go on record as opposing any policy which will have the result of effectively denying people in any region of Canada their democratic right to vote in a federal election.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** When the House rose at six o'clock, the hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) had been given the floor.

**Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher):** Mr. Speaker, I want to read into the record the motion which the hon. member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent) moved on behalf of his party. It reads:

That this House go on record as opposing any policy which will have the result of effectively denying people in any region of Canada their democratic right to vote in a federal election.

One has to analyse that motion somewhat to determine the reason for the motion in the first place. If one looks at it, one could interpret it as saying that any Canadian should have the right to vote because we read that this House should not adopt any policy which would effectively deny people in any region of Canada the right to vote. Section 14 of the Canada Elections Act, under which all of us are governed, is entitled "Qualifications and Disqualifications of Electors". It addresses quite a number of categories of Canadians who cannot vote in a federal election. For example, the chief electoral officer, the assistant chief electoral officer, judges appointed by governor in council and people undergoing punishment in Canada's penal institutions are just some of them. But is that what the motion intends? Having listened to the Leader of the New Democratic Party this evening, I do not think that is his intention. Rather, it arises from the fact that polls close at the same hour in every region of Canada. However, because of the different time zones across the country we have the difficulty of polls in Atlantic Canada being closed first and the votes counted first. Next are the polls in Quebec and Ontario. But as to those of us who live west of Ontario, whose polls are still open, as a consequence of United States satellite stations and television stations, we are told of the election results in eastern Canada. For instance, in Manitoba it would not necessarily influence the voting because we would only know a few minutes prior to our polls closing, but as one advances further west to British Columbia and Yukon, the problem is exacerbated.

• (2010)

When one takes a look at past elections, where elections were close, it is true that that problem did not exist. Obviously the need to find out which party will win seats, as one goes west, determines who will form the next government. When elections are close and minority governments are elected, for example, there is no problem. Also percentage-wise the problem generally has not existed in so-called modern or post-war elections.

I think the NDP is trying to address what happened in the 1980 election in which Canadians in western Canada found that a majority government had been elected up to the Ontario-Manitoba border. All western Canadians could do was add thereto, that is add to the government already elected. If all of us had voted against the party, in this case the Liberal Party, which formed the government—

**Mr. Huntington:** Most of us did.

**Mr. Epp:** Almost all of us did, with the exception of those people in the ridings of the two members from Manitoba. But it made very little difference; we were already excluded, so to speak, because the government was already elected. One must be careful to analyse whether the problem which exists is being resolved by the solution that is being put forward by the government.

There have been private members in my party who have tried to address this problem. I have absolutely nothing but praise for their efforts, but let me say in all frankness that the solution which they thought possible was not necessarily a solution. For example, the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Clarke) has a private member's bill along those lines, but if one studies his bill one finds other provisions in it as well. It was not only a matter of advancing hours. He had other suggestions such as the idea of a proxy vote which could be extended to other groups of Canadians, not necessarily those classified or categorized in the Canada Elections Act. In a sense his bill went much further in an attempt to address the question of how better to democratize the election procedure.

The motion before us in effect asks us to look at the electoral procedure as proposed in Bill C-113 which has had first reading but has not been passed through all stages in the House. In fact, it has not yet received second reading. Effectively that bill denies some Canadians, especially those in British Columbia and Yukon, the ability to cast their ballots. This is a serious matter. But I for one thought there were some other areas where the New Democratic Party could have proposed a motion. For instance, it could have put forward a motion concerning lay-offs, jobs, unemployment, farming, the lay-off of CN workers today or the fact that CFA appeared before members of the House yesterday. But the fact remains that this question is important and must be addressed by us.

When the government looks at parliamentary or electoral reform, I suggest it should prove that in fact it is serious and