

Private Members' Business

House of Commons has gone so far, it has gone too far, that this bill is the ultimate statement and indeed the ultimate denial of our role as intrinsic and authentic members of Parliament. This is the quintessential statement of partyism in Parliament.

At this time we are trying to get a debate going in Canada between two different concepts of what an MP might be, perhaps the Burkean model when we come here and give only to our constituents the benefit of our best thinking and our conscience or on the other hand the Jeffersonian model where we come here as delegates from our constituents to do their bidding here in our national Parliament. When we are trying to sort out between those two schools and perhaps come up in fact with a synthesis or a blending that is appropriate to Canada at the end of the 20th century, what do we get here in Private Members' hour? We get a bill that says that the minute that I would decide to sit as an independent, or anyone else here, or to cross the floor, we would have to go and have a by-election and the country would be put to that expense.

Being the bookish kind of guy I am, I looked in the book by John McMenemy, *The Language of Canadian Politics* where he defines what crossing the floor means. The author has a rather stark description of this event. He says: "It is an act by which a legislator leaves his or her party and sits across the floor from former colleagues as an independent member or as a member of another party. This action results from an irreconcilable difference between the member and his or her former party leadership and it is usually preceded by obvious signs of disaffection. It is a rare event for a member to become an independent because elections and House procedure, including recognition by the Speaker to address the House, are based on party affiliation. It is uncommon for an independent candidate to win against party-affiliated candidates. It is also rare for a member to change parties because though the person may be welcomed to another party, he or she might not be re-elected as a candidate of the new party".

It is evident that what we are discussing here is a very serious matter for the member who crosses the floor.

The member for the New Democratic caucus a few moments ago was referring to the member for Edmonton Southeast. I would like to pick up on that point from a different context. The member who is sponsoring this bill said he had done a little bit of research on this subject. So have I, Madam Speaker.

When I was first elected here, the member for Edmonton Southeast had been elected as a Progressive Conservative and then he sat as an independent. Under this bill that would institute a by-election. Then he came back to the Progressive Conservative caucus, a second change and a second by-election. Then we went through the general election of 1988 and then for the third time he left and sat as an independent, a third by-election. Then he left being an independent and joined the Liberal caucus, a fourth by-election.

I can almost see where he is sitting there, two seats to the left and two rows in front of the hon. member for Ottawa South. This is what the cost of his general election in 1988 was, costs incurred by Elections Canada for Edmonton Southeast, \$276,602.67. That includes the printing, the preparation of lists, the rental of polling stations, the printing of the ballots, all the notices, the fees of the returning officers, the assistant returning officers and staff.

I have heard the member for Ottawa South speak eloquently in this House about fiscal restraint and national finances. I have been impressed by his message. I suspect that on this bill he has not taken the effort to look into the financial consequences of what he is proposing. In the case of the member for Edmonton Southeast alone, the taxpayers of Canada would have had to spend over \$1 million to fulfil the obligations under this bill as this member for Edmonton Southeast was earning his place in the Guinness *Book of Records* of taking the most circumlocutious route to ever cross the floor of the Canadian House of Commons. That figure of over \$1 million for the necessary four by-elections that would be required by this bill is only the cost of Elections Canada. It has nothing to do with the party costs that would have been incurred in those four votes.

• (1740)

It seems to me that this bill is an attempt to penalize a member for what is probably one of the most difficult decisions of his or her political life. A private member does not leave the party fold lightly nor join a new one