

Supply

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, quite frankly I have a difficult time participating in this debate because it is a tough issue. There is not a party in this House of Commons or a party anywhere in the country, in any legislature for that matter, that does not have its difficulties with the issue of trust.

• (1750)

I have been part of a government where we have had problems with scandals, nothing to the extent that we have seen in the last few years, but the bottom line is today we have reached such a level of distrust in our system that we must address the issue.

I was reading an article by Sissela Bok, who is a professor of ethics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. At one point in her remarks she makes the following statement: "Public officials and candidates for public office bear special responsibility for the damage". She was referring to the damage related to the lack of trust.

The topic of her essay was today's "school for scandal". She is talking about everyone in business, government and all walks of life. Studies show that high school students claim they have this natural tendency. Sixty-six and two-thirds per cent of students in a study at a particular university said when the temptation for cheating was put to them, many said they would take it.

This is a problem not just in government, this is a problem within our whole society. Ms. Bok writes: "In a democracy it is not enough for citizens to respond by voicing their distrust of government and the press. Their categorical and often unthinking dismissal of all politicians contributes greatly to the problem. By opting out of serious participation in the political process they help corrupt the process".

This is the point I would like to make during the few minutes I have. I think one of the problems we have in this country related to trust is the fact that there are so many Canadians today who just do not get involved in the process.

I speak for members on all sides of this House. I worked on the Hill from 1980 to 1984 and I would watch members of Parliament debate in this House until 10 o'clock at night.

I was elected in 1988. I see members of Parliament on all sides of this House work their guts out for their constituents. I know of hundreds of examples of members of Parliament trying to put forward issues at town hall meetings in their communities and the public just does not get involved. They do not get out and work with their members of Parliament. We are only as good as the interchange we have with the people that are part and parcel of our community.

It is all well and good for the public and the press who are as much a part of this issue of distrust as any politician is. In fact it is the interaction of the press with the political culture that can quite often create a sense of distrust in the nation that is in fact 50 times greater than the actual reality.

I realize in this life perception is reality, but we have to go right back to the very root of this problem. The very root of this problem is the fact that the Canadian people have to get involved in the political process.

I am not necessarily pitching today that they get involved with the Liberal Party. Get involved with any party. Just get involved with the process. That is the one thing that irritates me.

We have all these people who are constantly criticizing politicians and constantly blaming everything on politicians but they have to realize they are part of the process too. We are only the agents or witnesses for our constituents in this House of Commons and we need their interaction and support. I think the Canadian people should get more involved.

I know hundreds of people, including businessmen, in the city of Toronto who have the time and resources to get involved in the debate on public policy. However, the closest they ever get to participating in public policy is when they make a donation. Because they make a donation or send a cheque to their local MP or the party, or they attend a fancy dinner they think that wow, they are participating in the political process.

Well, that is really not enough. We have to get the situation going in this country today where people of all ages are involved. I appeal especially to our teachers. I see many educators who do in fact get involved in the process. Students are brought to Parliament Hill day in and day out, but there are still tens of thousands of teachers who probably never even thought of busing their students to Ottawa or to a provincial legislature. It is only when the kids, the parents and the whole business