For the last three months I have made it my particular interest to examine the past practices of governments funding special interest groups, particularly government funded advocacy groups. These are really another type of lobby as we have heard already in the House.

I have looked very carefully into these groups. They are usually non-profit organizations. They are usually umbrella organizations that claim to represent hundreds of thousands of Canadians and hundreds of other organizations.

One of the very great difficulties with this situation where organizations like this are funded is that the nature of the law, both the Access to Information Act and the laws governing Revenue Canada make it impossible for a member of Parliament or a member of the press to independently examine the books of these special interest groups. Even their applications are protected under the Access to Information Act. The balance sheets they present annually are as they choose to present them. They are not subject to close examination unless by chance government audit. We have no control in that respect.

Even if these special interest groups, be they advocacy groups or other special interest groups are audited, it would be found that the majority of them are incorporated companies. It means that the principals of those companies which are not accountable for how they spend government money, are not accountable when the auditor comes by and perhaps finds something very much amiss.

•(1355)

I do not want to name any particular groups. I am deliberately being general. This goes even beyond that. In my research I have looked at many government funded advocacy groups that are up front, but among the special interest groups there are many groups that ostensibly are using the money for charitable or non-profit purposes. Because we cannot independently examine their books, we do not know whether they are using some of this money for lobbying purposes. We have no control. We may have lobbying with government money under the table, shall we say, and this is a very serious concern.

I would like to address this problem with two amendments to Bill C-43. We are talking about special interest advocacy groups, probably over 100, and we are talking about millions of taxpayers' dollars. Mr. Speaker, I hope you will give your due attention to the wording of these two proposed amendments. I have worked very hard on them. I have to say I am not skilled in preparing amendments and I am sure the staff can do better than I.

The first amendment I would suggest is that for individuals or organizations defined in the act as lobbyists it shall be an offence to use money received from government to lobby government. That is the first amendment and would take care across the board of all these umbrella groups that are taking money from the taxpayer and using it to lobby government, which at the very least is a conflict of interest.

On the other hand, we do not want to discourage legitimate charities or legitimate non-profit organizations from lobbying government when situations arise that affect them very closely. I would suggest that the Canadian Cancer Society certainly would want to speak to the government on the issue of the price of cigarettes and similar health issues. We have to provide that they can still lobby to some degree while shutting off those special interest groups that are secretly lobbying.

The second amendment I propose is this. For individuals or organizations that are not lobbyists as defined in the act it shall be an offence to use more than 10 per cent of money received from the government to lobby government. In this way we have taken care of the legitimate concerns of charities while actually putting teeth in the law for those who would abuse the privilege of receiving government money for acts of charity and use it instead to lobby for special interest purposes.

I hope that when the committee considers Bill C-43 they will also consider these two proposals.

I would like to just touch very quickly on a few deficiencies in the act. Some members of the Bloc have mentioned them. I have difficulty with the one tier, two tier system, but for different reasons than I have heard here. The one tier system is defined as an individual, whereas the two tier system is basically organizations and corporations. The one tier individual actually is required to declare more than the tier two organization.

The difficulty is many lobbyists incorporate themselves as companies so rather than being individuals they can incorporate and become tier two. We need to very carefully plug up that problem because we want to make sure that the individual consultant type lobbyist is fully governed by the restrictions and limitations that we wish to put him under.

I have one other difficulty. I have a problem with the ethics counsellor and the concept of an ethics counsellor in one respect. He is empowered to investigate and bring forward the results of his investigation to Parliament.

The problem is that nothing in the act indicates whether the ethics counsellor, when he gets his evidence, whether that evidence is going to be subject to the restrictions of the Access to Information Act and Privacy Act.

In other words, you could have a situation where the ethics counsellor gets third party information which he is not allowed to disclose as a result of the Access to Information Act and Privacy Act.