

Private Members' Business

On the second part of the motion, individual donations limited to a maximum \$5,000 a year, I reflect for a moment on the figure of \$5,000 and admit that the reasoning for this particular figure versus any other tends to allude me at this time. If it is representative of a certain percentage of the average Canadian income I think it is a little on the high side. On the other hand I am very pleased to see that it does not relate to the amount allowed for an income tax deduction because I anticipate, quite strongly actually, that the present income tax system will itself be remodelled during the next decade.

The concept of identifying a maximum amount for an annual donation is a good one. It creates the need for a candidate and his or her team to go directly to the grassroots, to the individuals involved in the election process to raise the funds needed to facilitate their campaign in getting their message across to as many more voters as possible. It will also reduce any undue influence that wealthy individuals or groups of individuals such as corporations, unions, associations, et cetera may have on the political process.

Some people may criticize this analysis, especially the second reason about the undue influence. They will possibly criticize this as being too cynical or for downplaying the role of public policy in an election. In fact this has already been done.

When the motion was first debated in this House, my colleague, the hon. member for Cariboo—Chilcotin, was portrayed by the members opposite as believing that “all those who contribute to a political system expect something in return”. That is from the March 18 *Hansard*, somewhere around page 2510.

• (1340)

At the same time members opposite use the standard line of many politicians contending that people donate money to political parties based on altruistic principles. That is, people contribute toward a process because they want good government.

I do indeed accept that many people donate for better government. It is certainly true and I wish to state unequivocally that individuals, corporations, unions, et cetera, do in fact donate to political parties and/or individual candidates for the purpose of good government and good representation.

However, as my colleague tried to point out on March 18, it is also certainly true that some donations are made in the political process for the purpose of influence. How else does one explain the fact that many groups, corporations, et cetera, donate money to two different parties? Do they believe that both parties have equally good policies? Or is it more realistic to believe that they want to retain influence in both parties so that whichever one forms the government they can point out later their financial support?

Another observation along this line would be the movement of some corporations, associations, et cetera, of their donations from probable losers to probable winners as the election campaign progresses. This does not mean we believe that every individual or group that contributes toward the political process is expecting something other than good government in return. However, it does point out there are other possible reasons for donating.

The Reform Party does not have a problem with private citizens spending their hard earned money toward achieving good or better government. What the Reform Party does have a problem with is large corporations, unions, special interest groups, et cetera, donating large amounts of money. I am not talking about \$100, \$1,000 or \$2,000 here, but donating large amounts of money to certain candidates or parties because they may see this as a way to control the political process and to influence or dominate a government's agenda.

That is precisely what this motion is seeking to prevent. We are all aware it is a basic reality of politics that for an individual or a party to get elected it requires funding. As an American legislator once remarked, money is the mother's milk of politics.

That is not to say those with the most money to spend on campaigns necessarily win. That was demonstrated in the results of this last election. However, we in the House must recognize that small donations made by individual citizens are the best way of funding of politics in Canada. It broadens the support needed by candidates to get elected. It also removes the opportunity for undue influence of wealthy individuals, groups, associations, et cetera, on the political process.

Mr. Bill Graham (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, before delving into the substantive issues raised by this motion I would like to make a couple of general observations.

It is unfortunate that the hon. member for Richelieu chose in presenting his motion to make some disparaging remarks about the integrity of those who participate actively in the political process. For example, he made several references to greed, pay backs, conflict of interest, connections, access to the inner sanctum, smoke and mirrors, et cetera.

He also claimed that Canadian chartered banks “run political parties behind the scenes”. Judging from the record and observation of the Canadian banks in the last few years, they have had enough problems running their own affairs without trying to run the political parties of this country as well.

Throwing aspersions on political parties, on members of Parliament and on those who make contributions to campaign funds does not advance the purpose of this debate. In fact such imprudent accusations reflect badly on the legitimacy and integrity of the House and its members, including the hon. member for Richelieu and the members of his party.