

Government Orders

I want to speak briefly about the independence of the ethics counsellor. I have heard one or two members make allegations that the ethics counsellor is not independent because he reports through a minister to the House. That is not necessarily true. The assistant deputy registrar general, which is the position this officeholder holds right now, operates in a quasi-judicial manner.

The Competition Tribunal and other bodies like it report through ministers but they operate independently, quasi-independently, or at arm's length from the government. The Director of Investigations is another one. That is probably a better example of someone who operates very much in an independent manner, yet the estimates and so on report nominally through a minister. There are plenty of cases like that.

In this case the Prime Minister looked at a person who was holding an independent office of the kind I just described. He was chosen to do the job, after consultations with both opposition leaders.

Finally, once the person is appointed, the appointment has to be reviewed by a parliamentary committee under our present standing orders. Need I remind members of that. Therefore it is an independent position.

Yes, the reports as to whether or not a lobbyist breached a code will be made through the Minister of Industry, who must report to the House within 15 days of having received that report. It is not optional. That report is automatically tabled in the House.

[Translation]

What will be in this report? It could, for instance, tell the House about lobbyists who charged fees that were too high, and therefore suspicious. I believe it is a good initiative. It goes very far in the sense that lobbyists will be identified publicly and individually.

I am one of those who thought that lobbyists' fees should automatically be made public. It is one approach and it is the one I put forward. Today, I recognize that this information would be buried under the mountain of data released.

[English]

We call that the paper blizzard. If you provide enough information it is about the same as not providing any.

The Prime Minister has very cleverly designed this plan so that only those lobbyists who do controversial things will be reported to Parliament through the registrar general. This would include the fees of those lobbyists. Therefore, if lobbyists—and I assume they would generally be tier ones—do something questionable, it would be reported to Parliament.

The rules in themselves do not change parliamentarians and they do not change people. We do need good rules and we will have good rules. These proposals will be reviewed by a parlia-

mentary committee. I hope to have the honour of representing my party on that committee.

I will conclude by saying that what is most important is good ethical and moral behaviour by all of us in Parliament. I think that will then filter down to people in the public service and everywhere else and we will regain the confidence of the people as we have started to do over the months since our party has been in office.

• (1300)

[Translation]

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak to this bill to amend the Lobbyists Registration Act. This legislation will regulate the work of those who lobby government departments and agencies on behalf of their clients' interests.

I have read the bill and support a number of its provisions. Naturally, I support the fact that the bill requires lobbyists to disclose the nature of their activities. I also agree that the departments and agencies who are being lobbied must be identified. I also believe it is a good idea that the identity of individuals or corporations involved in lobbying be clearly disclosed.

These are the main provisions I see in this bill. Basically, we expected these provisions.

Other positive aspects of the bill, to my mind, are the fact that it calls for the establishment of a code of ethics governing lobbying activities and the appointment of an ethics counsellor to oversee the application of the legislation.

Generally speaking, these are the positive sides to this bill. It would be rather ridiculous if we only had negative things to say. However, if we examine the bill in relation to what has now come to be known as the Pearson Airport scandal, we see that as it is now worded, the bill would not have prevented this scandal from occurring. We would not have received any new information besides what we already have.

With this bill, we would have learned that some lobbying took place with respect to the privatization of part of Pearson Airport. That is nothing new. We would have learned that the Department of Transport was also lobbied. But we knew that already. Perhaps an inquiry would have been called by the person responsible for the application of the legislation. Well, an inquiry was held into the Pearson Airport deal. The Prime Minister appointed a special investigator who looked into the deal and released a report, which explains why certain facts came to our attention. We have learned in particular that there was something in the wind because the investigator did not have the power to force people to testify, so that we could find out what really happened.

The bill before us provides for a code of conduct which is not a statutory instrument and cannot force people to testify.