

Canada Elections Act

Since we are all concerned about this matter, I hope members more directly involved will put their legal minds to work and come up with amendments to the elections law which will plug this loophole. Perhaps the acting House leader will have a response to the questions I am posing. I hope he does, because that perhaps would shorten the debate.

Hon. Norman A. Cafik (Minister of State (Multiculturalism)): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise at this time to conclude the debate on Bill C-5 and indicate—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I must advise the House that if the minister speaks now he will close the debate on this matter. Does any other member wish to speak?

Mr. Cafik: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I took it for granted, because I introduced this bill, that my remarks now would conclude the debate. I appreciate the co-operation of all hon. members.

I will repeat very briefly the two points that I indicated to the House earlier. One is in relationship to anonymous contributions. It had been the view of the government, when this matter was being discussed in contemplation of amendments, that it was not a loophole which would allow for anonymous contributions. It is evident that other members of the House do not share that point of view. It is not as though there is some provision in the amendments which would directly allow anonymous contributions over \$100. The question really arises because some suspect we have not taken measures to plug a loophole which existed in the original statute.

● (1532)

The legal officers of the Crown, as I understand it, originally felt that the existing statute did not require an amendment to prohibit anonymous contributions of over \$100. But it is quite evident that hon. members do not share that view. Acting on behalf of the government, may I say I can see no objection to putting forward what I would call a "comfort" amendment to make sure that the law is absolutely clear and precise in this respect. Then all hon. members will know the law and how it is to be interpreted and they will be able to follow it without any doubt or question with respect thereto. That is our first position.

The second one, as I have already indicated, relates to the proposed escalation provisions. A whole number of approaches could be taken to correct some of the problems existing in the present statute in this regard. I have indicated that the government will have an open mind in the hearings before the committee; it will take into account the various approaches which may be proposed and, hopefully, arrive at an approach which is acceptable to both sides of the House.

It is quite evident, from discussions with my colleagues in caucus and from listening to the debate which has taken place in the House of Commons, that there are a number of other questions in the forefront of hon. members' minds in relation to this statute. I cannot make a commitment to the House at

[Mr. Nystrom.]

this time as to specific resolutions which we might be willing to accept. However, it goes almost without saying that we are taking a pretty flexible approach to this statute. After all, it affects all of us as members of parliament; it affects our very existence as members of parliament.

I do not think it is a partisan matter, but one to which we all have to address our minds very specifically in the hope that we will pass a bill that will achieve the central purpose of the legislation, that of full disclosure and of getting rid of suspicions which may have existed in years gone by as to how parties and members of parliament are supported financially. That objective, of course, we all share. We shall examine whatever amendments and proposals are put forward to ensure that these central principles are left intact, so we can produce a law which will serve the public interest and to which individual members of parliament can relate.

I hope this matter will be dealt with expeditiously in committee, Mr. Speaker. I believe there is a broad basis of agreement. We will need sufficient time to formulate our approach to the specifics which have been mentioned in this debate, and I assure all hon. members that it is the government's intention to look at these matters very carefully. But any amendments to the bill should be put into the law as quickly as possible, since the Chief Electoral Officer requires the legislation so he will be prepared for any possible electoral opportunities which may present themselves to hon. members in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Is the House ready for the question?

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the minister would be prepared to answer a brief question.

Mr. Cafik: Of course, Mr. Speaker, if it is agreeable to members of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): The hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) on a question.

Mr. Nystrom: At least, I hope the question will be brief. The minister did not refer to the Roach case when he was speaking a few moments ago. Would he make a comment or two as to whether or not it is the government's intention to try to plug some loopholes concerning third party advertising?

Mr. Cafik: Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak on behalf of the whole government on this question; I am not the government, but only one member of it, as hon. members know. I can indicate, from a personal standpoint, that I have concerns which I share with the hon. member who raised this question. This is a matter of some importance to which the committee should address itself and make what the committee believes appropriate recommendations for amendment.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.