

Motions

system and private members' business in the House of Commons it is anticipated that the private Member will increasingly become the target of lobbying efforts.

Under the provisional Standing Orders of the House, standing committees now have unlimited mandates to study matters within their jurisdiction as well as the power and budget to engage the services of professional staff. It is our belief that in addition to all the usual contact points, these Standing Committees may provide a new focus for lobbying activities.

● (1150)

The bottom line is that we found the world of lobbying to be a changing world. It has all sorts of complexities that we want to address. One concern of committee members was that we establish a level playing field. We wanted to make sure that all those involved were playing under the same rules, restrictions and guidelines. That is why we recommended that members of the Canadian Bar and other professionals such as accountants be included in the registration. If memory serves me correctly, when members of the Canadian Bar appeared before the committee, they recommended that if we proceeded with the process of registration they should be included. We of course did that in our report.

My friend from Nickel Belt spoke about our experience in Washington and Sacramento. There is no doubt that those trips had a significant impact on the committee. We got some firsthand experience in that we were able to talk to people responsible for registration as well as those being registered. In addition, and this is something often overlooked when committees travel, members of the committee had the chance to get to know, appreciate and respect each other. The result was the unanimous report which we produced.

One significant thing to come out of the trip to Washington was that we learned there were so many loopholes in the registration process there that you could drive three or four semi-trucks through them side by side without danger of hitting anything or anyone. For example, lobbyists only have to register if they deal with elected representatives such as Senators or Congressmen. Our experience in Canada is that a very significant portion of lobbying in Canada is not done with elected representatives at all but with the bureaucracy, its various officials and staff. That was a very important thing to take note of and address in our report.

In Sacramento we discovered that a great amount of detailed information was required. Strangely enough, the effect of that was that you had such a great amount of information it became virtually useless and almost made a mockery of the process. We wanted to address that as well because we wanted a system which was simple, clean and effective. Yet we learned that even with all that detail there was very little need for a large staff. In other words, all of the necessary machinery for the registration process could be handled by a small group of people. Again if memory serves me correctly, California has a population roughly equivalent to that of Canada.

Mr. Kilgour: It is bigger, 26 million.

Mr. Cooper: So a little bigger than Canada. A very complex registration process requiring a great deal of information, yet a very small staff to handle it. I think that is important because one of the concerns I heard expressed since the report came down is that we have to be careful because this will require a tremendous bureaucracy and all sorts of funding. The reality, given our experience in both Washington and Sacramento, is that this is not the case at all.

Another point that has to be made is that for some reason there is a feeling that lobbying is a dirty word. We in the committee felt nothing could be further from the truth. I would like to refer to the committee report and read one paragraph which I think speaks to this particular issue. Let me quote the following, again from the same page:

Your Committee is impressed with the role that special interest groups or lobbyists play in the dissemination of information on matters of public policy. The lines of communication which are developed by these groups are important in the resolution of government policy.

A critical part of policy development in any government is to accept and even seek out information and views from those affected and the public at large. Lobbyists often present competing views, supply what might be otherwise unavailable information, and propose solutions so government can better assess the implications of proposed policies.

It was very important that we recognized in our report the role and responsibility of lobbyists. The report was not in any way designed to suppress them but, rather, to encourage them and get everyone on a level playing field with a certain amount of openness. That I think does not so much convict the guilty as protect the innocent. That was certainly one of the fundamental principles in the preparation of this report.

Another point which I think is important is that in several interviews after the report was issued the press wanted to know what kind of incidents of wrongdoing we had come up with. What had we seen that was unethical. The reality is that we did not come across that sort of evidence. I think that if all Members were honest, we could say that the issues which have gained some sort of profile in the last little while could probably be counted on the fingers of both hands, if not one hand. My point is this. There have been incidents which have caused the Canadian public concern, incidents involving lobbyists, incidents involving Members of Parliament. However, the reality is that it is a very small number of cases. The vast majority of Members of Parliament are very honest, sincere and hard-working people. That fact crosses Party lines. The same applies to the lobbying industry. By far and away the vast majority of those people are sincere, honest people who do everything in an ethical, honest and sincere way. The point of the registration is to deal with the exceptions and get everyone on a level playing field where they are treated equally, fairly, and where the public can be assured that what is going on is in the public eye, and help eliminate this feeling of things being done behind closed doors or under the table.

I want to look briefly at the recommendations made by the committee. As is apparent to everyone, we recommended the adoption and implementation of a system of registration for paid lobbyists. We also recommended that the Government