

In doing that my colleague for Essex—Windsor in particular pointed out that one of the problems we have had in the province of Ontario is the election of a provincial government with a very large crop of inexperienced political people. There are particular problems when it comes to what we might loosely regard as standards of conduct or a singular lack of appreciation of some of the things done and not done in public life as opposed to those done in the private sector.

In my earlier remarks I pointed out that I thought it was what caused the deluge of court cases on the government's backbenches in the earlier years of its mandate from 1984 onward. It had a large influx of members, particularly from one province, with no previous political experience.

Rather than rules and regulations maybe we ought to be asking members of political parties across Canada to take care when they are nominating candidates for public office to nominate people with some level of experience either in elected office or in political activities so that we nominate people and elect people who have some appreciation of the standards of conduct that ought to be expected within political bodies.

Until we are ready to address the voters, hit them right between the eyes and say it is their responsibility in terms of the conduct of public officials, particularly the people they elect, we are not going to solve the problem.

According to my experience, if we draw up a lot of rules, regulations and codes of conduct, we provide a list of specific offences, and as long they do not come within those narrow definitions they think they are free and can take advantage of it.

That is the kind of situation we had a few years ago in the province of British Columbia with a premier who did not understand the difference between good conduct and bad conduct.

An hon. member: Dave Barrett.

Mr. Kristiansen: No, it was not then. Until we address those kinds of problems and not just the legalities of specific codes of conduct, we will not solve the problems we have been faced with during the last few years.

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I hope the member will appreciate that we have tried to raise the level of this debate and keep it away from the list of names that were unfortunately read into the record earlier by the Official Opposition. We have tried to lift it out of the gutter and get it into some kind of discussion of principles.

I am afraid, because of his not paying attention to that, we might degenerate into a name calling affair again which would not be in the best interest of democracy or of this House.

Mr. Crosby: Mr. Speaker, at the outset of my presentation I specifically said that I had come here hoping to debate the merits of conflict of interest and code of conduct legislation but I knew that other people had other reasons. I agree with virtually everything the member has said.

Let me take this opportunity to talk about Bill C-43. It is not by any means perfect legislation. It contains very much the kinds of problems that the member just articulated. If we make a series of rules and somebody falls between them they think they have escaped any ethical damnation when in fact in the eyes of the public they have done something wrong. In the case of Bill C-43, I would support it except for the provision about spouses because I do not think it is consistent with the modern theory of married couples and their respective rights. Some statements in Bill C-43 are less than onerous: "Members will refrain from accepting any benefit, the acceptance of which might erode public confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity or impartiality of a member". Does that mean we can accept benefits that do not do that? Give me a break. It is not an easy subject and I do not think it will ever come up with any kind of legislation.

Getting back to my friend in the Liberal Party and his statement that members want to go ahead with legislation, I do not really think that is the case. I think individuals in the House can study a piece of legislation and say it is better to enact it than not to do so. However, I find it hard to believe that there is anything close to unanimous consent on Bill C-43 or any other code of conduct for the very reasons members articulated.

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate on a motion put by the Official Opposition: