Lobbyists Registration Act

the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker? Three months later this urgent basis had been forgotten because we got a White Paper which discussed the pros and cons of registering lobbyists. How could we discuss the pros and cons of registering lobbyists when the Prime Minister had made a solemn promise? A solemn promise is like a sacred trust, you cannot breach it. Surely the Prime Minister would know you do not breach sacred trust. He has had to deal with that issue before, and I think he found out the hard way that when you make a solemn promise you are supposed to live up to it.

I do not want to digress from the main topic at hand here, but we were disappointed that the Prime Minister did not bring his lobbying Bill at that time. In any case, that was December 19, 1985 and there was still no Bill. The White Paper itself was shelved for five months.

Finally in April, 1986, after a few more scandals, a few more trouble spots for the Government, the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure was mandated by the House to study the report on the registration of lobbyists. On that committee we had the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), the Hon. Member for Athabasca (Mr. Shields), other government Members and myself. We had, I think, a very good non-partisan study of the possibility of registering lobbyists. We studied this issue here in Canada. Then we went to Washington and to Sacramento, California. Those are two jurisdictions which have a system of registering lobbyists. We looked at their systems and identified the strengths and weaknesses of each one. For instance, the weakness of the system in Washington was that one was only deemed to be a lobbyist if one were lobbying an elected person. If one were lobbying an unelected official, say the executive assistant or chief of staff of a legislator, one did not have to register. Obviously that was a tremendous weakness in the system. If one is lobbying Government, whether it be a Member of Parliament, my executive assistant, my constituency assistant or the chief of staff of a cabinet Minister or even a Deputy Minister, one is still lobbying the Government. Obviously one should have to register the very same.

On the other hand, when we studied the system in California we found that it really asked for a lot in the way of detail. As a matter of fact it asked for so much that the system actually became buried in itself. Lobbyists there, I believe, have to register not only the lobbying activity but the fees they were charging, which I kind of like, but there was much detail, such as having to file with the registrar each month every invoice of every expense over $10 or something like that. It means that if a person went to the restaurant and spent $12.50, that person had to get a bill so he or she could put it with the expense account and file it at the end of the month. Can you imagine lobbyists filing into the state legislature at Sacramento with a great big box full of invoices and stuff at the end of every month so they could prove to the person in charge of registering lobbyists that they had not exceeded the amounts in every category and so on for that month? That kind of a system,

needless to say, would be a bureaucratic nightmare. There is no way we would want to hire a group of people to administer that. It would be costly and because it would ask for so much information, the information we were looking for would probably be buried in some other information and we would end up knowing nothing at all. That is not what we wanted.

So our committee made a good and strong recommendation and prepared a report which we tabled in this House. The report which the committee tabled asked the Government to have a system of registering lobbyists. Some members of the committee, and I think I would be fair in saying it was the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt and myself, would have wanted to register the fees and disbursements of lobbyists—in any case the fees of lobbyists, but some of the government Members felt that was to onerous, particularly in the beginning.

In an effort to obtain a consensus of all political Parties we agreed that for the time being we would not ask for the registering of the fees and disbursements of lobbyists so long as we got the name of the lobbyist, the name of the lobbying firm, the name of the company or organization which paid for the lobbying activity and the subject matter of the activity as well as the name of the person or governmental organization which they were lobbying. That was, in fact, what we were looking for initially. Our recommendations also proposed after a period of some years that we review the system with the possibility of increasing the requirements on lobbyists at that time. With that review included in our recommendations we went along. However, we did recommend as well, and I will now read from our recommendations:

[Translation]

I read the following recommendation: We recommend prohibiting lobbyists from accepting from their clients any remuneration connected in any way with the results of lobbying. This simply means, Mr. Speaker, that it is prohibited or should be prohibited, according to the unanimous report of the parliamentary committee, that a lobbyist be able to demand fees based on results. For instance, if I am a lobbyist, I cannot go to a client and say: That will be $1,000 for lobbying, and $10,000 as a bonus if I get results. We say that should be prohibited. In any case, I am sure you are aware, Mr. Speaker, that in some provinces lawyers are not allowed to charge fees on this principle. That is the case, for example, in Ontario. Does the same apply to Quebec? I don't know. Some could enligthen us and I hope that during the debate we will have shortly, someone can enlighten us on that.

As I see it, being able to charge fees based on results can lead to abuses. We know of only one firm of lobbyists that sets fees this way now and I assure you that it was quite controversial. Perhaps if this lobbying firm stopped doing so, most Canadians, I think, would feel that the system was much better.