

Lobbyists Registration Act

the most powerful lobbyists on the Hill and around the bureaucracy are the associations like the Bankers Association, the Pharmaceutical Association, and BCNI. They really have the clout around here. We have observed the influence that they have had on the Government with respect to legislation. They will escape, scot-free, from the network of registration.

● (1230)

Canadians have every right to know who is doing what to whom and, I would add in one of my amendments, for how much. That is absolutely essential in a democratic system. It must be totally transparent. My amendments seek to erase the difference between Tier I lobbyists and Tier II lobbyists.

Second, I want to ensure that the amount of money paid by the lobbying activity, or the amount spent on a lobbying activity in the case of associations, is on the public record. That amount indicates the importance of the issue to those who want to have the change.

Third, even the Tier II proposal of the Government would eliminate the registry of those who would attempt to get an appointment to a board or commission. That is maintained in Tier I but completely eliminated for Tier II so that all the hacks can continue to be appointed without any right of the public to know about the relationship between those making the appointments and those making the representations on behalf of the appointees.

That is not in keeping with what the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) wrote us in 1985, when he stated in his letter that we would have a transparent system, that we would not only be registering the lobbyists but registering the particular lobbying activity.

It is absolutely essential that the public be aware of the particular issue. We know that there is direct and indirect lobbying. All of us are aware of the vast numbers of letters we received with respect to the tobacco legislation. While we have no proof, all the letters were the same and obviously some groups were spending considerable amounts of money to put out those letters and have people sign and mail them. I suggest that that is a form of lobbying about which the public has a right to know. Parliamentarians and bureaucrats have a right to know who was sending out this information and how much they were putting into the lobby. In fact, it was all done by the Tobacco Manufacturers Association, who hired Bill Neville to make the big pitch. Canadians have a right to know that. Canadians have a right to know about the issue, who is behind it and how much they are paying.

Bill C-22, to amend the Patent Act, suddenly came upon the scene. Were the drug companies approaching the bureaucracy and, if so, those who were opposed to the changes ought to have been aware of it so they could mount their campaign as well.

Where did the question of free trade originate? I have no doubt in my mind that it originated with BCNI. I have no

doubt that Tom d'Aquino and BCNI were pushing the Government into adopting the free trade program. We have a right to know what those who lurk in the shadows and dark recesses of Government are doing. We should be able to put the light on those who hide behind the curtains and do their deals in the dark.

The Canadian public has every right to know, as the Prime Minister once said. That does not only apply to access to information, it applies to all things relating to Government, including influences on Government. It is extremely important.

The Government took the position in committee not to accept any amendments. It refused to accept any changes to the legislation in the committee. In fact, I got the distinct impression that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Andre) was an unwilling sponsor of this Bill. He did not even want to have a lobbying Bill. The lobbyists have done a very effective job on the Government with respect to the lobbying Bill.

The Minister kept saying the Government did not want to register lobbying, that it wanted to register lobbyists, in spite of the fact that the Prime Minister said lobbying activities must be registered. We supported the principle of lobbying but we cannot support a Bill that has turned out to be a powder-puff Bill. We cannot support that because it would be participating in a nothing Bill.

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox—Powell River): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on this Bill and the amendment proposed by my colleague, the Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez). We are concerned about the issue of the public's right to know. That should not be confused with other issues that have been raised in the House.

The public has the right to know who is attempting to influence the decisions of Government. Not only should they know who is doing it, they should know the specific issues they are raising and how much money is being spent on it.

Let us consider the example of the submarine program, which is subject to millions of dollars of lobbying, and consider how that relates to the importance of this legislation. Yesterday there was a debate on the submarine program. Conservative Members spoke in favour of it and Opposition Members spoke against it.

Unfortunately, there are small groups of very powerful and influential people in this country who want this program to go ahead because of the large amounts of money they can make. These groups include the classical organized lobbying groups like Public Affairs International, Government Consultants International, Corporation House and a number of others.

Mr. Ouellette, who heads Government Consultants International, is a personal friend of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) from law school days. He was a principal instrument in his leadership campaign. The same organization involved Frank Moores, a personal friend of the Prime