

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, when shall this bill be read the third time?

On motion of Senator Bolduc, bill referred to the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance.

• (1710)

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION (FISCAL MEASURES) BILL, 1992

THIRD READING—DEBATE ADJOURNED

Hon. John Lynch-Staunton (Deputy Leader of the Government) moved the third reading of Bill C-76, to amend certain statutes to implement certain fiscal provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 25, 1992.

Hon. John B. Stewart: Honourable senators, Bill C-76 is an omnibus bill which deals with three matters. I will say something about each of those three matters. I do not think what I am going to say on the first two will be controversial; certainly, it will not be partisan.

Clause 12 of the bill relates to the Lobbyists Registration Act. It provides:

The Governor in Council may make regulations

(a) requiring a fee to be paid on the filing of a return, or a return of a class of returns...

As required by the Lobbyists Registration Act.

In the committee, a question was raised as to the appropriate level of fee to be charged. It was pointed out that the word "lobbyist" covers two or three different categories. For example, the Canadian Student Federation is a lobby and would have to pay whatever fee is prescribed by the regulations to be made pursuant to the proposed clause 12.

Similarly, those people in Ottawa who hang out their shingles and advertise for business with signs at the Ottawa Airport saying, "Come to us if you really want to get the ear of the Deputy Minister," they too will have to pay a fee. The question was raised in committee: "Will the regulation distinguish as between these two types of lobbyists?"

In the first presentation in the committee, there was no indication that a distinction would be made. However, when the Minister of Finance appeared before the committee, he indicated that cognizance would be taken of this difference. That was helpful. We know that Senator Murray believes, and of course correctly, that assurances given by ministers or deputy ministers in committee are not binding, that it is the words of the statute which are binding. However, in this case,

it seems reasonable to assume that the Governor in Council will recognize the difference as Mr. Mazankowski has recognized it. This is what he said:

I would not want you to take that as a given, but my sense is that it would certainly be a matter for consideration, because I believe the two have to be viewed in a completely different context. I am not sure what Minister Vincent has said about that but my sense is that, because of the difference between the two types of lobbyists, there would obviously be some difference in the way the fees would be handled.

It is good to have that comment by the Minister of Finance on the record, and if the committee accomplished nothing else, it was worthwhile to have the bill examined in the committee and to have that comment in our records.

While I am on this matter of lobbyists, and when the credibility of government and Parliament is being questioned in polls and public statements right across the country, we all have to recognize that there has come to be far too close a relationship between lobbyists and political parties. I do not say "the government party," but political parties.

For example, in today's *Ottawa Citizen* there is a story by Jane Taber. She mentions the names of lobbyists and how they are integrating themselves as key players in the Progressive Conservative leadership campaign. The article states:

In some cases, one firm is with one candidate, but in others, lobby firms are split down the middle, sharing their people with both candidates.

What is this? Individual preference? Commitment to the ideals and policies of a certain candidate? Or the cynical view: covering yourself for the day after the vote, ensuring that your firm has access to the inner sanctum?

I am not protesting against lobbying. I suppose it is inevitable. What I am saying is that it is unfortunate that we find this very close relationship between party activity on the one hand and lobbyists on the other. This is not confined to the Progressive Conservative Party. I anticipate that if the Liberals win the election — I hope they will — that we will have exactly the same type of problem. I hope that we will recognize it and cope with it in some way. If there is anything that makes the people of the country cynical, it is this close relationship between hired lobbyists and the government.

The notion is beginning to spread that if the lobbyist gets a big fee for a certain bill — pharmaceuticals, helicopters, what have you — that it was the fee which really drove the legislation, not the substance of the legislation. If we are to have a healthy political system in Canada, we have to do things which do not foster and nurture that type of cynical view in the public mind.