

Lobbyists Registration Act

If we had such a registry which applied not only to individual companies such as GCI and PAI but also to the associations, we could cross match. If we needed information on who was approaching the Government on what issue—for example, on the pharmaceutical question Bill C-22 that was passed—we could go to the computer to find out who the lobbyist was and, if that were the issue, it could be cross matched with the file in Washington. In that manner we could find out if the pharmaceutical association was lobbying the Canadian Government for certain changes and if in the United States a lobbying firm was lobbying the Canadian Embassy with respect to making sure that the Government of Canada made changes to the Patent Act with respect to pharmaceutical products.

A democracy cannot survive if people do not have information. One of the greatest guardians of democracy is an informed citizenry. If citizens do not have the correct information, they are left to surmise and speculate. I suggest that that undermines the whole process.

There are two other federal Acts of Parliament which are extremely important to this whole question of transparency and the right to know. The first one is the Election Expenses Act, an extremely important Act where contributors of more than \$100 are listed. It is important to know who is supporting the political parties and the candidates and that that information is up front and open. We did not have that before. The second one is the Access to Information Act, not the type that we see here where many things are blacked out, the Government chooses to delay certain information, and the commissioner of Access to Information Act states that the Act is being frustrated by the Government.

In 1983 the Prime Minister was correct when he said that the Liberals believed that Canadians did not have a right to know. He stated that Conservatives believed that Canadians had every right to know. I agree with him, and every right thinking Canadian across the country agrees with those words, but they are only words. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Here we have a Bill which will complement those two federal pieces of legislation and federal laws, and Bill C-82 is an eunuch. The Government has eunuched lobbying registration, and it is a sad day for openness of government. It is a sad day for the transparency of government within a democracy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate with the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre.

• (1630)

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am glad to have the opportunity to put a few comments on record with regard to this legislation. I appreciate the impassioned plea that my colleague who spoke before me made for common sense when it came to lobbying legislation.

I must say that in listening to my colleague, the lobbying critic of the NDP, one is driven to the conclusion that this legislation is simply a sop to public opinion. It comes two and a

half years after the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) promised it in an open letter to the public. It is just a way to smooth over troubled waters. It is a piece of legislation without teeth, without real intent to control lobbying, without real intent to throw light on the whole question of lobbying. In listening to our critic, to the critic from the Liberal Party, and to the Minister as he presented his case for this legislation, I have come to the conclusion that this legislation is nothing more than a sop to public opinion, rather than being a real attempt to control lobbyists, a real attempt to bring to public light the activities of lobbyists, or a real attempt to reinforce the democratic traditions of this country. It is just a way for the Government to get out from under the reputation that it developed as a Government of scandal.

It is this conclusion that I want to examine by looking at the facts, at the substance of the legislation. If this conclusion stands up, it is a major condemnation of the Government.

The first limitation in this legislation which stands out is the one with regard to the kind of information that will be provided to the public. We on this side of the House and our spokespeople have said that the information is inadequate. Not only should the name of the lobbyist be made public, not only should the subject of their lobbying be made public, but the people they contact ought to be made public. I suppose that members of a Conservative Party, Members with a Conservative philosophical bent, might argue against a comprehensive provision of information by saying that it will just create another bureaucracy. My reply would be: Why bother with the regulation of lobbyists? Why bother with seeking to create something called a registry of lobbyists if it is not going to have teeth, if it is not going to in fact deliver the goods, if it is not going to provide the kind of information that is necessary if we are to control the activities of lobbyists?

Another inadequacy of this legislation is the fact that it does not provide the kind of information that people need if they want a true picture of what goes on in lobbying in this capital. The parliamentary committee made recommendations which highlighted the inadequacies of the legislation, which is to say, that we should not only have the name of the lobbyist but the subject that the lobbyist is lobbying about, and the contacts that the lobbyist is approaching.

It would be useful as well, if we are serious about registering lobbyists, for this legislation to require lobbyists to disclose the costs of their lobbying activities. Why not provide it by indicating how much they are spending in order to lobby the Government on a particular subject?

Would it not have been useful for the Canadian public to know, in particular all Canadians who used their democratic right to seek to influence the Government when it came to the generic drug legislation and their efforts to preserve the protection they had against sky-rocketing drug prices until the election of this Government, who was lobbying the Government? Who was scuttling that legislation which provided such a unique form of protection for Canadian consumers? Who