

Private Members' Business

Accordingly I am directing the table officers to drop that item of business to the bottom of the order of precedence. Pursuant to Standing Order 94(2)(b) Private Members' Hour will thus be suspended and the House will continue with the business before it prior to Private Members' Hour.

It being five o'clock, pursuant to Standing Order 30(6), the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

Mr. Rod Murphy (Churchill) moved that Bill C-283, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act (election expenses), be read the second time and referred to Legislative Committee H.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to introduce this bill into the House of Commons. It is the first time I have introduced this specific legislation, although I have dealt with similar legislation in the past.

The purpose of this legislation is to clarify the definition of election expenses as it relates to the costs incurred by individual candidates and political parties during an election.

Members of the House who were here prior to the 1988 election will remember a committee of the House of Commons looked into the affairs of Marcel Masse, the cabinet minister, and his election expenses in the 1984 campaign. We were all shocked to find out that Elections Canada had deemed that a lot of expenses that were conducted by that campaign were not to be included in the election expenses. They were called by a new definition "campaign expenses" and did not come under the limitations that the legislation which was passed in the early 1970s called for. In other words by spending money in certain areas that candidate in his campaign was able to spend a lot of money and basically ignore the limitations that the legislation had called for.

As a result of that loophole we found out that that category had expanded in 1988 and that a number of campaigns had spent money in those areas. We do not believe that is fair.

The legislation passed by this House of Commons almost 20 years ago has been the law of this land for that length of time. It specifically calls for a limit on the amount that a campaign can spend at the riding level and a limit at what can be spent at the federal level.

I realize that there is a royal commission at the present time and that the royal commission has also been asked to look at this particular issue. I am concerned knowing that royal commissions of the past have tended not to report by the time that was specified. It does not look like the commission itself will report until January.

Even with the best of wills in this House of Commons and even a very non-partisan approach from the royal commission to the legislation that will come does not guarantee that any draft legislation or any follow-up legislation to the royal commission will be in place in time for the next federal election.

We know that traditionally we do not invoke parts of the election act until one year after it has been passed by the House of Commons. We know that in 1974 we had an election using old election legislation even though the House of Commons and the Senate had passed new election legislation.

The reason that occurred is that the election legislation that passed prior to the 1974 campaign was not passed soon enough to allow the mechanisms to be put in place and acted upon. I am very concerned that even if the royal commission comes down with a very firm definition on election expenses among the other things that it has to deal with in its mandate there is every chance that this House of Commons will not have passed new legislation in time for it to be in effect for the next federal election.

I basically tried to take a non-partisan approach to this legislation. The original wording came from the Ontario legislation obviously passed prior to the election of Bob Rae. It therefore obviously was not put together by the New Democratic Party.