

Government Orders

farther, as I just said. By taking small steps from Parliament to Parliament, we may eventually reach our goal.

[English]

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today on amendments to the Lobbyists Registration Act.

The primary reason for changing the act is to ensure that decision making is done with transparency and under public scrutiny. We are trying to ensure that lobbyists are going to truly represent the people and not special interest groups. I applaud the government for making these changes to the Lobbyists Registration Act.

Historically, lobbyists have wielded enormous power. Their numbers are not insignificant; they have grown from over 800 two years ago to some 944 as of March of this year. They have often operated in a secretive fashion and not, I believe, in the best interests of the public. It is unfortunate their power has been so significant because they do not necessarily represent the silent majority this country has. It is something the people of Canada have often felt powerless to engage in.

These individuals run their agendas through government, often peddling their influence to certain groups. As I said before, it is not necessarily in the public interest that they prevail. It is wise to look at some of the changes this act provides.

The proposed legislation tabled today is aimed at restoring public confidence in the decision making process. As part of its commitment to ensure that members of Parliament are given a greater role in drafting legislation, the government intends to send this bill to committee before second reading as permitted under the standing orders. I applaud the government in doing this because it makes the process more open to all parties.

The proposed amendments would strengthen the Lobbyists Registration Act by increasing the transparency of lobbying activities directed at the federal government and by increasing the power of the newly employed ethics counsellor to investigate complaints about lobbying activities. The amendments follow the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Government Operations requiring all lobbyists to reveal more about their projects.

Consulting lobbyists who act on behalf of clients would be required to file more specific information of their undertakings. Right now they disclose only the general subject matter of their lobbying campaigns. Under this bill they would have to report the following: the specific subject matter of their lobbying efforts; the name of each department or government institution

to be contacted; the techniques they will use; and the true beneficiaries of their efforts.

Under the current act in-house lobbyists who work for companies or organizations need file only business card information. Under this bill they will be required to file once a year specific information including the following: a description of who their employer represents and the employer's lines of business; the specific subject matter of their lobbying efforts; the name of each department or government institution to be contacted; the techniques to be used; and the names of the employees who engage in lobbying.

All lobbyists would have to inform the registrar of lobbyists within 30 days of the termination or change of activity.

• (1030)

Lobbyists that do not adhere to these rules can be found guilty of a criminal offence and fined up to \$25,000. It is interesting to note that these penalties are often missing in the lobbyists registration acts in the United States.

This act is a leader in North American and in first world nations because it gives some teeth to the act that are missing in other countries. It also provides for the ability of the RCMP to enforce the act.

The legislation tabled today also provides that the ethics counsellor would develop in consultation with the industry a lobbyists code of conduct and investigate complaints about lobbying activities that run counter to the code. It would also make a public report of the results of any investigation. These are all in keeping with the transparency I mentioned before and can only be applauded.

With the legislation the government intends to ensure that lobbyists cannot exercise the undue influence they have in the past. The primary reason for revamping the Lobbyists Registration Act will ensure, as I said before, that decision making is done with transparency and under public scrutiny. It will try to ensure that lobbyist representations are made very clear and the techniques they use are made very obvious to everyone concerned.

There are some amendments that we need to make. The new ethics counsellor is available to the Prime Minister to investigate cabinet ministers. We believe it should be the other way around. Instead the Prime Minister should be available to the ethics counsellor for these investigations. The reason behind it is that we feel the counsellor must be independent of political influence.