

Government Orders

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as far as we reasonably could.

We could also make any small and necessary changes in wording to correct past errors and past problems in the act, many of which had been pin-pointed by the Chief Electoral Officer in his reports to Parliament following the general elections in 1984 and 1988.

We had our work cut out for us. The committee embarked on this detailed study of the act. The chairman has indicated how many hours we have spent in this committee toiling through draft bills. It is very tedious work. I hope this debate is a little more lively than some of the committee proceedings have been, although there have been moments of interest and excitement there.

What are the problems with the bill? I want to state, and it will become clear in the course of my remarks, that while the committee made a series of recommendations in the form of a draft bill to the House the government took the draft bill away and doctored it up a bit.

As a member of the opposition and as a member who believed we were working on full consensus I naturally have some concerns about the doctoring that has gone on. Our party supports this bill in principle. We are attempting to assist in its passage at the second reading stage. We will seek amendments in the course of the committee work on the bill and at report stage.

We hope that the government will see fit to agree to some of the amendments that we are going to propose. I want to talk about the problems that I have with the bill first, and then I will mention a few of the more positive aspects later. The principle of this bill is reasonably sound but we have problems with specifics.

The royal commission cost the Canadian taxpayers \$20 million. That money has been paid out, but the advice of the royal commission is being ignored by the government in many cases.

I want to start with the issue of the representation of women in the House of Commons, which is one that the royal commission considered very directly. It occurred early in the first volume of its report. In the course of its many detailed studies on this issue the commission

determined that there were systemic and structural barriers to the entry of women to this House.

I quote from page 107 of the report: "Among the structural barriers identified, however, two are paramount. The first is the cost of the nomination process. The second is the lack of concerted efforts by political parties to support women seeking nominations".

Those were the two principal problem areas that the royal commission identified as barriers to women entering this House. So that everyone is aware, out of the 295 members of this House 13 per cent are women.

• (1940)

On page 110 the royal commission said: "Another troubling question is why so many fewer women than men seek nomination. Several factors appear to be at work here. Based on the socio-economic analysis presented earlier, it is clear that family responsibilities, still shouldered largely and as a prime responsibility by women, deter many competent and interested women from seeking office at least until their children are older.

A second factor is that women tend to have less employment security and thus face a greater potential impact if they lose their bid for public office at the nomination stage, as a candidate, or following one term in office. As the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women noted, one of the most obvious financial costs associated with running for elected office is the risk to employment. Many women cannot afford to gamble their jobs on the chance of winning an election.

Finally, it is clear that some women are deterred by the differential media treatment they receive as political contenders. Our research showed that although the coverage of women in politics has improved over the last two decades it remains stereotyped, focusing much more often on women's appearance, personal life and opinions about specific issues such as abortion".

Clearly the commission did not feel it could do much to affect the media's coverage of women candidates but it did feel it could do something to make the nomination process more accessible and open for women candidates. It made a series of recommendations in its report. First, it recommended that spending limits be put in place for