

We are attempting to get the clients of lobbyists before our committee. One of the reasons that clients may very well be going to lobbyists is because they think the lobbyist has got some connection. Maybe that is why they might keep paying out—like a tithe—the money to the lobbyist. They think that he has some magic elixir.

What adds to that is when the person is seen Thursday morning on television across the country on CTV and he is defending the government's position. This is the same person who is the lobbyist. Right away, in his mind, the client wants success for his project. He wants the contract. He wants the procurement. He wants the change in the act. Therefore, if he has to pick, he will pick someone he thinks has influence or a pipeline to the Prime Minister's office or to a cabinet minister. He thinks that and that is why he will do that.

What if we can level the playing field? We heard from Sam Hughes with the Corporation House lobbyists who came before us this afternoon. I consider Sam to be a fine gentleman and probably the epitome of what a professional lobbyist is. He derided this connection because, from what you have said, people will go on paying for somebody if they think he can buy access for them so that they can get to the minister.

I think that when we do the things that I suggested about separating the activities on behalf of a political party, whether it is the NDP, Liberals or Conservatives, then we are making the playing field more level and putting some professionalism back into lobbying.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River): Madam Speaker, this is to the member for Nickel Belt to whom I have listened intently. He made reference to a former deputy minister who had worked for I think the Canadian Shipowners Association. I was struck by the facts of that case because it shows how incestuous the relationship can be.

I was just wondering how the member would comment on this where that particular former deputy minister was retained by the Canadian Shipowners Association in 1991 to lobby the government. However, before the end of his contract he went to work for the government. He was retained by the government to do work for the government and did not even bother telling the Cana-

dian Shipowners Association. Ultimately his contract expired or was terminated.

Could the member comment on that incestuous relation aspect of lobbyists that we are trying to get a handle on here?

Mr. Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

What happened was that former General Ramsey Withers was given a contract by the federal and provincial governments to be a consultant and to co-ordinate a transportation review. That ended because he registered with the Canadian Shipowners Association as a client on December 12. Two weeks prior to that, the contracts with the governments had ended. He then took the contract two weeks after with CSA.

He recognized when he was a deputy minister—he left the government in 1988 as a deputy minister—that he should wait a full year before joining this consulting firm GCI. He went from government to GCI in one year.

When he had the contract and was working for the government he had a client within two weeks. What is striking about the client is that the client was one of those who was an interested party. I am not saying that Ramsey Withers in any way did anything dishonest. I am making that crystal clear, but it is perception that we have to deal with.

In politics, perception is reality. When dealing with lobbying, one is actually walking that very fine line—my colleague from Halifax West pointed this out—between making a representation, advocacy and influence peddling. It is a very fine line.

In lobbying the line is very fine indeed. These people, for a price, have to go and convince somebody to change a law or make a tax change or get a contract. You have to understand the sensitivity of that. There has to be a lot of transparency.

As someone said, sunlight is the best disinfectant in the business of lobbying.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Forestry): Madam Speaker, I am very inter-