Canada Elections Act

can and who cannot vote. In many ways, Whitehorse is a rural area to many people. In our riding many people work out of town, particularly in the summer.

● (1740)

Although the previous speaker said the proposed amendments would address this problem because you could be registered on the Friday previous to the election, I am afraid I cannot agree. For example, I have seen many construction workers and highway workers who live in lodges out of town and do not even come into town until perhaps the Sunday prior to election when their employer has allowed them some time off. It is quite possible that they would be left off the lists. The amendment proposed would not address that issue. I do not believe this is strictly a regional problem. I am sure many people in many Canadian towns work outside of those towns and simply are not there to be registered at enumeration time.

This Bill rightly addresses a very serious problem for many people. I realize, as the previous speaker said, that there are always problems of abuse. There are those problems the way it is now. An enumerator comes to your home and you can say you are John Smith, I suppose. Yet we rely on the honesty and integrity of our citizens to make the system work. It will not work if we do not operate from that assumption. Therefore I believe this Bill will not occasion any further abuses but will in fact address a very serious problem of disenfranchisement. I feel very seriously about this issue, having witnessed many of the problems this summer, and harmonizing territorial and provincial legislation with federal legislation simply makes good sense.

On the second issue of access to condominium apartment buildings and hotels, I recognize there are some problems with that. However, again in territorial legislation at least, and I understand it is in the legislation of many provinces, it is possible to enter apartment buildings and so on for this purpose. Generally speaking, the person entering the building must have a letter to show that they are legitimate workers for the Party or the candidate. I appreciate that this can cause some concern but if everyone entering the building has the proper documentation, I do not see it as a great problem. Again, this conforms with existing territorial and in many cases provincial legislation which allows entry to apartment buildings or condominiums during elections.

As to the question of hotels, I quite agree that going to a hotel down the street from this House may not be necessary in order to enumerate and canvass. Yet in many areas of Canada, and I suggest many urban areas, certainly in my own area, many people reside in hotels. On every enumeration list numerous people appear as permanent residents of a hotel. That is not unusual. For a variety of reasons people choose to live as permanent residents of hotels. I do not think one can make a sweeping statement about hotels being a non-legitimate residence for election purposes. It is a residence for many people in my riding and I believe in other ridings in which I have canvassed and worked for other political candidates.

With respect to those two issues, in particular that of trying to bring about consistency between territorial, provincial, and federal legislation so that people understand what they can and cannot do with respect to swearing in at the polls and access to apartment buildings, I think they are very important and would lead to greater democratization of the system.

As to the third issue, that of allowing overseas visitors and students to register to vote, I presume at an embassy, again I cannot see that as particularly contentious. Obviously if you are abroad you must have legitimate documents as a Canadian citizen, some travel documents, and so on. It seems to me it is not particularly hard for such a person to register abroad and vote.

In conclusion, I very strongly support the points made in this Bill. It is very important that it receive support and go forward because the issues it addresses will unfortunately not be addressed, at least at this point, by the amendments in Bill C-79.

Mr. Reginald Stackhouse (Scarborough West): Madam Speaker, like other speakers in this debate, I want to support the intent of the Bill which I think will redress serious problems affecting many electors in our country.

I think of the provision in Section 2(89)(1) as affirming the rights of the elector rather than giving any advantage to the candidate or the Party or the campaign worker. It affirms the right of the tenant in the apartment, the owner of a condominium, or a permanent long-term resident in a hotel or apartment hotel to have access to the candidates among whom he or she must select. That right has been denied in many parts of this country on the assumption that if you are living in an apartment, condominium or hotel you somehow do not have a residence. There is an assumption in our country that unless you own a house, you do not really have a home.

Increasingly we find that people make their homes in the kinds of domiciles to which this legislation refers. I raised my children in a house. We now live in an apartment. I have owned a condominium. They are all great, but the assumption that a house is what everyone must have is no longer viable. Different kinds of accommodation suit different kinds of people at different stages in their lives. At all stages of their lives, regardless of condition or circumstances, they should have an equal right to participate in democracy.

Thank God we live in a country where voting does not put us at risk. I certainly want to endorse what the Hon. Member said in introducing his Bill, that to contrast the deplorable and savage situation in Haiti with the rights we have in this country is to make a statement which will drive home to everyone the great privileges we have in a democracy like Canada. However, always we have to make the system work more effectively. I believe that is the intent here and I hope the Bill will have an opportunity to be considered and find its way into legislation, particularly with reference to the provision