

*Government Orders*

In essence when all is said and done the ethics counsellor will be able to decide what areas these particular lobbyists are interested in focusing in government. This will give us a concept from where this kind of activity is coming from and where it is directed at government.

Many people have argued in the House that it does not have any teeth, that it is a waste of time and it is a media show. I have discovered that here are some of the teeth in the legislation. For those who do not adhere to this process there are fines of up to \$25,000, the role of the RCMP is being strengthened by increasing the limitation period for laying charges in summary proceedings from six months to two years. If lobbyists knowingly make false or misleading statements they could be liable to a fine of up to \$100,000 and a prison term of two years.

These are very serious charges. These are very serious results of not abiding by this legislation. I think very clearly the government is very interested in cleaning up our act.

Through these changes I believe that we will start to temper the views of lobbyists and special interest groups but, more important, give government back to the people.

I would like to discuss a second aspect of this legislation which is conflict of interest. I am a chartered accountant. I have been enrolled in the Institute of Chartered Accountancy since 1974. We have a code of ethics. Most professional organizations have a code of ethics. If you break it you are out.

Why not in this House have a code of ethics? That would assume we are professionals. I will give a quick definition of professional. It is one who values the interest of their clients over those of their own personal interest.

In reality what conflict of interest guidelines and ethics counsellor are attempting to do is make the people of Canada our clients, to put the importance of our clients way above our own personal interests.

This is what the Prime Minister means when he is clear to the commitment of duty, but the interest of the electorate must come before those of ourselves.

I am sure many members of Parliament have had the same kind of problem from being a respected professional to going out and being a politician. I remember an incident at a spring fair in the last election. People would come up to me and say: "So, you are a crook too". Nobody has ever in my life referred to me as a crook. Because I had changed my cloak, if you will, and had suddenly become a "politician" aspiring to be a member of this House, I was thought of as a crook. In some ways that kind of spirit is still out there. We have to address the root causes of that. We have to set standards in this good House.

• (1335)

This section has teeth as well. I would like to refer to section 20 of the guidelines. This refers to parliamentary secretaries and cabinet ministers: "Guest hospitality, other benefits, including those described in section 21, that could influence public office holders in their judgement and performance of official duties and responsibilities shall be declined".

I just picked that out of interest. I wonder how many of our parliamentary secretaries and the cabinet ministers are going to be looking under their Christmas tree this year, wondering whether these things have to be returned based on this legislation. I think it is very real. It is a very real influence.

To bring the two aspects together, one being the conflict of interest aspect and the second being the reform to the Lobbyists Registration Act, the ethics counsellor basically has a number of functions. One is to develop a code of conduct in consultation with interested parties. A second is to have the powers to investigate possible breaches of the code of conduct.

The most important aspect of all is to make a public report as a result of this investigation. This will be done once a year. When I saw this I immediately thought of the Auditor General. I thought of the great opportunity for the opposition parties to make political hay from this. That is a possibility, a good possibility.

Imagine a government dedicated to integrity and changing the system that would invoke legislation of this kind which will only serve to possibly embarrass it. We can clearly see the strong commitment our party has to changing the integrity and the office of elected officials.

In conclusion, under these revised, specific codes of ethics, they will clean up our system. The only problem with these things is some people will say they do not go far enough, that we could have extended it more specifically to all members of Parliament.

The people who are exempted from this legislation are the opposition parties. There is no code of ethics for them. There is no commitment to a higher standard for them. There is no professional enrolment or engagement for them. Maybe they would like to bring forward their own code of ethics.

In any case, this is a tremendous move in the right direction for the people of Canada, empowering the people of Canada to bring back government and the voices of the people of Canada to this House.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron: Mr. Speaker, how much time do we have left?

The Deputy Speaker: Three minutes, unfortunately.

Mr. Bergeron: Three minutes.