

I do not propose to speak to its provisions, except to say that I think the hours of voting proposed in that bill would never be acceptable in eastern Canada. Some of the other provisions of the bill deserve consideration, such as mobile polls and changes in proxy voting procedures.

Indeed, if Bill S-11 should go to committee, I would like to see some of the provisions of the act studied, particularly those concerning proxy voting. In my opinion, the present procedure is too complicated and, indeed, often frustrates the very purpose of proxy voting. Again, when I speak of proxy voting, I am speaking only of the way it works in the constituency where I live, which is partly urban and partly rural.

Proxy voting is a commendable procedure. It is dealt with in section 46(1) of the Canada Elections Act. It is not long, and I would like to quote it. It says:

Where an elector whose name appears on the list of electors for a polling division at an election is qualified to vote in the polling division at the election and has reason to believe that he will be unable to vote in the polling division at the election, during the hours for voting on the ordinary polling day and on the days fixed for the advance poll and for the taking of votes in the office of the returning officer by reason of

- (a) his absence from the polling division in the course of his employment as a fisherman, mariner, member of an aircrew, member of a forestry crew, member of a topographical survey crew, prospector or trapper,
- (b) his illness or physical incapacity, or
- (c) his absence from the polling division while a full-time student duly registered at a recognized educational institution in Canada during an academic term,

he may, in the prescribed form, appoint another elector whose name appears on that list of electors and is qualified to vote in the polling division at the election to be his proxy voter to vote for and in place of him at the election.

The section is somewhat long. I believe it could be cut in two without affecting its meaning. However, there are some practical difficulties. One is that someone must certify that the voter belongs in one of those categories. Let us take, for example, the case of a voter who is ill. The voter must name another voter from the same poll to act as a proxy. The proxy must then consent to so act and take the form to the returning officer; and proof must be presented that the voter is entitled to vote by proxy. In the case of illness, this requires a certificate from a duly qualified medical practitioner stating that he has seen the voter and that the voter is unable to vote because of illness. That certificate must be on the doctor's own letterhead, and on that letterhead must be shown the doctor's address and telephone number.

It must also be remembered that a person can act as a proxy for only one voter. This makes it somewhat difficult. Let me give honourable senators an example. Bear in mind that I am speaking of a constituency that is partly rural and partly urban, and one where the urban centres are not so large. In the last federal election I received word that there were some

voters in the hospital who wanted to vote by proxy. I saw them and had them sign the necessary forms. However, I could act as a proxy for only one. So, for all the others I had to get someone from that polling station to agree to so act. Sydney is the centre where the returning officer has his office, and someone had to go to the office in Sydney. In one case the proxy voter had to travel between 25 and 30 miles to get to the returning officer's office in order to obtain a certificate to vote by proxy.

Let us take the case of a student. Again, here the procedure could be improved. For a student at university who wishes to vote by proxy the act sets out the procedure. There must be a statement by the registrar of a recognized educational institution in Canada that the voter is a full-time student. I may say that these are all forms that have to be filled out. The returning officer provides the forms. Then, of course, the student must name someone to act as his proxy, and, again that person must go to the returning officer to obtain the necessary certificate. Surely it would be sufficient, for example, for the parent to certify that the voter was such a student, and I believe it certainly would be helpful if the same person could act as a proxy for any number of voters at any poll.

• (1600)

I think, too, that a Canadian student qualified to vote who is attending a university outside of Canada should be allowed to vote in Canada. I do not see the necessity for the voter or the proxy voter having to attend personally before the returning officer. I know of no reason why, for example, the official agent of the candidate could not attend before the returning officer with all the completed forms in order to obtain the certificate.

This procedure is complicated. I have had some experience with it. You have to have a reliable person to act as a proxy; otherwise, if you are not careful, he might vote the wrong way.

In any event, the procedures are cumbersome, and most of the parties, when they have gone through them half a dozen times, say that it is not worth it; they stop doing it, and some people are thus not able to vote. As most of these are cases of patients in hospital, it would be quite easy to arrange a different procedure, as I will describe.

Bill C-237 mentioned mobile polls, which means that polls would go to places like hospitals in order to allow people to vote who could not come to the ordinary polling station. Let me explain. In the town where I live we have a home for senior citizens. Some 90 people reside there, and a polling station is established in the home. Those who can come to the polling station which has been set up can vote in the usual way. For others who wish to vote, but on account of physical disability cannot do so, the poll goes to them. There is no problem. The deputy returning officer and the poll clerk, together with the agents, if they wish, go through the building and allow them to vote. Everybody is satisfied with this procedure. In such a case, the voting is completed in a couple of hours at the most.