

electoral reform. The spending limitations that have been imposed on national parties and on candidates have been good, in my opinion, and in no way impair our ability to conduct campaigns. We restrict advertising now to the final 28 days of the campaign, which can only be regarded as a godsend insofar as the long-suffering viewers and listeners in the country are concerned.

The provision of public funds to national parties and to local candidates, and the institution of a tax credit in respect of donations to political parties, have given our political parties the opportunity, if they want to take advantage of it, to make the system as a whole more democratic, and to make themselves much more effective at the constituency level if they wish that.

● (2130)

Our election law seeks to invest that final act of voting, when the citizen is alone in the privacy of the polling booth with his or her conscience, with as much dignity and, indeed, solemnity as possible, and to keep it as free of extraneous influence or pressures as possible. We black out television and radio advertising 48 hours before election day. We go so far as to forbid the use of campaign signs and party insignia near the polling stations. One of these days we may even get around to trying to deal with the activities of professional pollsters during the writ period.

So the problem that I raise, and which Senator Austin has alluded to in his speech—that of the United States broadcasting stations broadcasting election results from eastern Canada into western Canada hours before the polls close there—is, in my opinion, a real problem, and I think it is appropriate for us to take some legislative action on it. I say that without necessarily committing myself to every detail of the bill before us.

Bill S-11 provides that the polls will remain open for 11 hours on election day, as is now the case, but that the times would be different in the different time zones across the country. The result is that the polls would close in British Columbia and the Yukon one and a half hours after the polls close in Newfoundland, instead of four and a half hours, as is the case now.

Senator Austin adds a new wrinkle in his bill. He would provide that the counting of the ballots would begin no less than one hour after the closing of the polls. The effect of that, which is very relevant to the problem of the American broadcasting stations beaming results to western Canada before the polls close, is that the count would not begin anywhere until the polls had closed everywhere.

Obviously, honourable senators, no one wants to create a new evil in eliminating an old one, and if I support this bill it is because I do want to see discussion go forward on all the possible hardships and inconveniences that might be created. In particular, I think a committee of this place or the other place should hear from those most directly affected and concerned, such as the voters, the representatives of the various political parties, and the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff.

For example, no change is proposed by Senator Austin in the hours of voting in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and eastern Saskatchewan—that is to say, in the eastern and central time zones, where the polls would be open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., as they are now. In the mountain region, the polls, under Bill S-11, would be open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.

It seems that the greatest possibility of hardship would exist at the extremities of the country—that is to say, in the Atlantic provinces and British Columbia. For example, in Newfoundland the polls would open at 10.30 in the morning, when most Newfoundlanders, I believe, have already done half a day's work, and close at 9.30 in the evening. Newfoundlanders would then have to wait for an hour before starting the count. That would take them to 10.30 p.m. What would happen between 9.30 p.m. and 10.30 p.m. I don't know. Perhaps it could be called a happy hour, or perhaps not. One would have to give some thought to that problem. But seriously, that makes a long day for what are called DROs, Deputy Returning Officers, and scrutineers, not to mention the candidates, their supporters and the general public.

In British Columbia the polls would open at 7 o'clock in the morning, according to Senator Austin's bill. That is quite early, particularly in some of the larger ridings in that province, to ask your election personnel and staff to be on the job.

I think we all understand that the ability of the various parties to recruit partisans to do the myriad jobs that have to be done in connection with the campaign, and on election day, is a function of the enthusiasm that our supporters feel in a given election. There is a continuing problem, I think it fair to say, in recruiting people to do the jobs that have to be done under the supervision of the Returning Officer and the Deputy Returning Officer. The pay is not great, and I found in the last couple of elections that in many constituencies the Returning Officers and the Deputy Returning Officers had a difficult time recruiting people to do some of those jobs. I wonder whether the awkward hours that this bill would create in some parts of the country might make it more difficult.

There is an added problem in that the bill deals with time zones. We must observe that there are five provinces in this country in each of which more than one time zone applies. In connection with this bill, the two provinces that would be concerned would be Saskatchewan, which exists in both the central and mountain time zones, and British Columbia, where mountain and Pacific time zones apply. So, under this bill, what we would have in both of those provinces would be different opening and closing times in different parts of the provinces. I raise the question for later consideration as to how much, if any, confusion or of a problem this would create.

Honourable senators will be aware that there are other bills similar in intent although different in detail in the mill in the other place. I have one here, Bill C-626, which was given first reading in the other place on January 26, in the name of Mr. Kilgour; and another, Bill C-237, in the name of Mr. William Clarke, introduced on May 2, 1980. Both of those, of course, are private members' bills. Mr. Clarke's bill would reduce the hours available to vote from 11 to eight, and he would have the