

He said: Mr. Speaker, anyone living in British Columbia has experienced the outrage, or at least the irrelevance, of turning on the television or radio at eight o'clock on election night to find that a majority government has already been elected.

In this electronic age it is probably impossible to prevent the news from leaking out in advance of eight o'clock, the time the polls now close. Even though there is a prohibition on broadcasting such information in Canada before eight o'clock p.m. on election night, there are occasional slip-ups across the border. United States television signals are available to residents of western Canada close to the border. They can find out in this way, accidentally or otherwise, that as far as they are concerned the election is over. Anyone who wishes to get this information in advance has only to telephone a friend in the east at six o'clock Vancouver time. He can find that the election is over, or whatever the result happens to be.

This may not appear to be serious, but there is, in close ridings particularly, a winner's syndrome, if I can call it that. It is something that would force the person who wants to have a voice in the government, and who sees that the only way he can get that is by having a government Member of Parliament, to spread the word to a number of friends to hold back from voting. They could then go en masse to the polls later in the day and swing an election in a way that it really was not intended to go.

My proposal in Bill C-237 is for what I call a national election clock. The polls would open at the same instant everywhere in the country and close at the same instant. There are seven time zones in Canada. I am ignoring the most westerly one, the Yukon time zone, because there are so few electors there and it is a very small time zone.

Under my proposal, the polls would open local time in the Newfoundland time zone at 12.30 p.m. and close at 8.30 p.m., from 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. Atlantic time, from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. eastern time, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. central time, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. mountain time and from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Pacific time. That is the same instant across the country. The polls would close at the same instant, according to my proposal, exactly eight hours later.

At present the polls are open for 11 hours. Any of us in this House who have visited polls on election day will have observed that there is a very slow period of voting during each election day. In fact, probably not more than 25 per cent of the voters in any particular poll arrive before four o'clock in the afternoon; in other words, in the first seven hours. Eight hours, as suggested in my proposal, would be an adequate amount of time to allow all voters to come within a reasonable period of time to cast their ballots.

This would improve the working conditions on election day for the approximately 200,000 people in all of the political parties and all of the polls who are now required to be on duty from early in the morning until late at night. It would be better for poll workers.

The results of the election would become available at the same time all across the country. I often have complaints from

my friends in eastern Canada who say they have to wait until midnight or one o'clock to find out whether I have been elected. My proposal would take pity on those people in the east and allow them to retire earlier, having the information about who in the west has won. There has only been one time in the last ten years when the vote was very close. The decision was actually made in the west in 1972. The vote was not decided until the count got over the mountains.

There are two other bills that have been presented, one in the other place and one here, Bill S-11 and, Bill C-626, which have identical proposals to amend the Canada Elections Act. They are identical to each other, not to mine. The difference is that while they respect the opening at different hours across the country, they provide that the polls be open for 11 hours in each case. Therefore the polls in the Pacific time zone would have to open at seven o'clock in the morning, quite an unreasonable hour. In Newfoundland the polls would not close until 9.30 p.m. which I suggest is too late for them to be open. Under my proposal, no one would have to stay up late. The polls would close at the same instant and the results would be available to all Canadians at the same moment.

I was not content to restrict my bill to the election clock; I proposed to deal with one or two other problems. One complaint that has come to me often in elections is that people have moved within the riding. They cannot vote at their new place of residence. Canadians being quite mobile, they move at all times of the year. This can be a particular problem in rural ridings, but even in a city an individual might move eight miles across town. He would lose his vote unless he were willing and able to make that trip back to the place where his name was on the polling list.

To overcome that problem, I propose in Bill C-237 that transfer certificates be issued within a riding to enable a person whose name is on the list in another poll to vote at a different poll within the same riding.

One feature of the bill is that it would provide for all absences to be covered. Under Section 46(1) of the existing act, proxy votes can be obtained for people who are going to be absent from polls for varying reasons. One section reads:

- (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,

I have had some personal experience with students and those who must be away for one reason or another or because of illness and physical incapacity. The procedure is quite cumbersome. Canadians are often denied their vote because they are unwilling to bear the cost, get a medical certificate from a doctor or because the registrar of an educational institution cannot be reached in order to obtain a certificate of that kind. Canadians travel in this jet age. Trips are often planned months in advance. We do not know when an election will be held until two months or so in advance.