

Conflict of Interest

Our goal must be to encourage well-intentioned people to seek public office and to prevent such office from jeopardizing the reputation and solvency of the incumbent.

The proposed legislation is part of our effort to have a political system where the views and desires of Members are taken into consideration in the debate that takes place in Parliament and in the decisions that are made there.

To have an open, fair and equitable political system, the Government has tabled legislation to regulate the activities of professional lobbyists.

The Bill was passed by the House of Commons and is now in the other Chamber, where we hope the Senators will adopt the legislation without delay.

We feel it is important for the public to know what lobbyists are and what interests they represent, if our system of government is to function in an open and fair manner.

It is therefore important that this legislation should become effective as soon as possible.

[English]

There have been other initiatives of reform. Some time ago the Government announced a new system for the selection of federally Governor appointed judges. In designing and developing the process, we were acutely aware of two principles by which Canadians expect their judicial selection process to be governed. First, to ensure that the outcome of the process will be judicial appointments of outstanding capability and undoubted merit. The second principle is to ensure that the workings of the process be fair and open, moreover, that they be seen to be fair and open. Similar principles, merit and value, fairness and openness, have guided our thinking in fashioning a series of improvements to the federal Government's procurement process. In designing these improvements, we have been determined to ensure that at all times suppliers receive a fair opportunity to compete for government contracts and that they are made aware of the rules of the game so they can see for themselves they are being dealt with fairly and even handedly by the Government.

I want to say something about appointments. There have been various allegations of patronage to which the media has devoted so much attention.

Mr. Boudria: And government back-benchers.

Mr. Lewis: One should know that government appointments to agencies, boards, commissions and foreign service postings, are the exclusive prerogative of the Prime Minister, as they have been in the past. There has been no change in that system. The Government in Council appointments involve some 2,613 jobs on government agencies, boards and commissions. That is 1.1 per cent of the total Public Service population of some 231,000. Of the 2,613 appointments to these agencies, boards and commissions, only 377 are full-time jobs. Therefore, the Prime Minister of Canada, whether it is the present Prime Minister or past Prime Minister, has the authority to appoint 0.2 per cent of the number of full-time

public servants. It is not as though that is all a Prime Minister spends his or her time doing.

I could review for the House a list of outstanding appointments, but I just want to refer to the last two. The last two appointments are the appointment of Yves Fortier to be the Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations—

Mr. Rodriguez: How about McDermott?

Mr. Lewis: I will get to Mr. McDermott in a moment—or Ian Deans. And Donald Macdonald who will be the Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Boudria: I want to hear all about Gil Christie.

Mr. Rodriguez: Yes, Gil Christie.

Mr. Lewis: That demonstrates the Prime Minister's commitment to make appointments that are firmly based on merit and not political affiliations. Both my hon. friends opposite may want to denigrate the appointments of Yves Fortier, Ian Deans and Dennis McDermott, but I do not think that is fair. All those gentlemen served their country. My friends may want to denigrate their appointments, but I do not think it is fair. They are not here to protect themselves. I am rather disappointed that the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) and the Hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell (Mr. Boudria) would want to denigrate those appointments in that way.

● (1630)

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, we have before the House today a piece of legislation dealing with conflict of interest. As soon as the Bill becomes law, it will affect all Parliamentarians, both in the House of Commons and in the Senate. As my colleagues have explained in greater detail, the Conflict of Interest Commission, an independent body consisting of three members, will monitor the implementation of these provisions. The Commission will report to Parliament. Members of Parliament, their spouses and their dependents will be required to disclose fully all personal interests to the Commission.

[English]

The Act is quite complete. It provides, for example, for definitions to conflict of interest and permitted private interests. It details the obligations of Members of Parliament. It details how contracts and benefits to former Members of Parliament should be handled. It prohibits the carrying on of business by certain Members of Parliament. It establishes a conflict of interest commission, as I said, to oversee the Act, to regulate, to provide opinion, to investigate and to report. Members will be required to furnish a personal information statement within 60 days of their election, and they must report material changes. Any infractions under the Act have to be reported to the House of Commons, and they must be considered by the House of Commons within 15 sitting days.