

each day and the sense of frustration there must be among constituents who have the same concerns as any other citizens in Canada but who have no one to whom to turn or relate.

That is why this simple amendment to the House of Commons Act would provide that, in the case either of a death or a resignation, there would be a period of not more than 90 days or not more than 135 days in which a byelection would be called.

It is also interesting to note that the average number of days before elections were held in ridings which were held by Liberal members was 205 days. This is during the period of time I have been here. When a Progressive Conservative, New Democratic Party or Social Credit seat was vacant, the period was 287 days. When we consider that, we can say that it took longer for an opposition member to have his byelection called. I do not think the number is significant enough to reflect a charge that it was purely for partisan reasons that a government would call a byelection at some particular time, but the fact is that, be it for government members or opposition members, the time is simply far too long to allow a constituency to be without a member. When we combine the figures both for the government side and for the two opposition parties and average them, it should be noted that seats have been vacant before byelections an average of 251 days. There have been some 27 byelections in that six-year period, 23 the result of resignation and four the result of death.

By contrast, we should look at other democracies around the world. In the United States, upon the death or resignation of a senator or congressman the governor of the state affected is empowered to appoint someone immediately to fill the vacated position.

In Great Britain the Speaker issues a warrant to the clerk of the Crown, who immediately issues a writ for byelection as soon as the Speaker notes that the seat has been vacated, and nomination papers must be filed—and this is interesting—no later than nine days after the writ has been issued.

In Sweden every member has an alternate candidate who immediately takes the seat as soon as it is declared vacant.

In The Netherlands the seat is immediately filled by the first person who is prioritized on the list of the party which forms the government. As soon as a seat is vacant the other person on that alternate list takes his place.

In countries such as Australia and New Zealand, when a seat is vacated it is almost immediately filled so that constituents can have representation.

When a bill somewhat similar to the one I am presenting today was proposed on November 25, 1977, the hon. member for Trinity (Miss Nicholson) responded in part with the following words: "The cost of byelections is something which has to be taken into consideration because they are extremely expensive." Surely that is one argument we can dispel. Considering the money spilled every day in the operation of government, surely it does not make any sense to leave a seat vacant and people without representation for more than 200 days. In my six years the average has been 251 days. It should not

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make sense to us as parliamentarians to say to constituents that we would like to give them representation but it costs too much, because I do not think that washes in a democratic society, nor with the constituents who are without representation.

Further, the hon. member for Trinity argued against the bill on the basis that, without the government's prerogative of flexibility, we might be forced into a winter election, and how could we hold an election in places such as Yukon? If that was a valid argument in 1977, surely after the experience of 1980 it no longer is valid. Otherwise, members of the Liberal party would say that the last election should be thrown away because it was a winter election.

If we held an election again this summer, I think we would get better results. Nevertheless, we have had winter elections in Yukon and in the two Northwest Territories constituencies. In most of those northern provincial ridings, they all had elections this past winter. Simply I would say that when the argument comes as to representation versus whether you hold it at some time of the year, the fact of the matter is we are Canadians and we have winter every year. That is something which should not bother us. It might be chilly, but nevertheless the ink still goes on the ballot.

● (1730)

My good friend who is a member of the government party now, the hon. member for York East (Mr. Collenette), in that same debate of November, 1977, indicated that one of the advantages of the present system is that it allows the government to call byelections in a group which affords the government and opposition parties an opportunity to sound out public opinion. I think it is a blatant use of the byelection to say that we will hold them off and have them all in a group and that, when we hold them in a group, it will be some signal to the government or the opposition as to what some feeling or mood is out among the constituencies of Canada. The purpose of Parliament is to give a representation to the citizens of Canada. The purpose of holding byelections is to allow those citizens to continue their representation. The purpose of byelections is not to serve government or opposition parties, because there are other means and mechanisms for doing that.

If any members of this House, in reviewing the bill I have drafted and presented to the chamber, find that in some way they want to make some amendment to it in time or in some choice, I would be agreeable to that. But I am sure that on principle virtually all Canadians feel this is the kind of system we ought to lock into our parliamentary forum for the purpose of giving some sense of continuity and some sense of order to the calling of byelections, so that at least there will be the belief in the public that those byelections were called for the needs of the constituents and not for the purpose of a government holding on to power, extending its power, or doing whatever it might that would appear to be self-serving, even if that were not the motive of the government of the day.

With that in mind, I would simply want to say that there are other advantages to this bill which I could extend. There are