

*Private Members' Business*

**Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East):** Mr. Speaker, I will not take much time but I would also like to strongly support this motion from the other side of Canada.

We have just been through a provincial election where there was no possibility for people to vote if they had not been on the voters' list and had not gone to pre-election registration places. I can tell you that in the east end of Vancouver, there were whole blocks of people—I am thinking particularly of people in native housing, for example—who were left off the list.

It was a real abrogation of what we call a democratic process. I know most of my party would strongly support this.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Bob Layton (Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to comment on the proposal tabled by the hon. member for Don Valley West to amend the Canada Elections Act.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's purpose in proposing this amendment to the Canada Elections Act is to allow urban voters to have their names added to the list of electors on a polling day, as is presently the case in rural areas. I myself represent the riding of Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis, a riding that is both urban and suburban.

[*English*]

At the moment, under the Elections Act, a rural voter whose name has been left off the official list can have his name added and can vote on election day.

All of this has been expressed in this House. There has been the experience of the electors who were not on the list and could not vote in the urban ridings. The rural voter simply has to take an oath and have someone whose name appears on the official list vouch for him or her. This is not possible for urban voters under our current electoral system.

In the urban areas, an enumeration team of two people calls on each household to fill out the record of enumeration. After these visits each qualified voter should receive a notice.

Too often people are not available at the time of the call, and a notice of enumeration card is sent in the

mail. The purpose of the notice is to confirm that the voter's name is on the official list to explain where and when to vote.

After the enumeration, the official list can be revised. It is still possible for an urban voter to have his name added to the list, but he must make a special effort to contact the Elections Canada office for his riding to find out where the revision office is and when the revisions will take place. He must then make personal or sworn application to have his name added to the list.

The urban revision offices close on the seventeenth day before the election. If at this time an urban voter's name is not on the list, he loses his right to vote.

Contrast this, Mr. Speaker, with the situation of a rural voter who may have his name added to the list even on election day.

I believe that the bill before us raises two principles which are central to the values we hold as Canadians: the principle of democracy and the principle of equality. In Canada our democratic rights are guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 3 of the charter says that every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein. This is a constitutional right.

The Canada Elections Act then sets out the rules for the exercise of the constitutional right to vote and as with all entrenched rights, the right to vote is guaranteed, subject only to such preamble and reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

Canada has virtual universal suffrage. There are limitations; exceptions for federal judges, prison inmates, patients in mental institutions, and those who are disqualified for corrupt or illegal electoral practices. All citizens who are 18 years of age or older are entitled to vote. But if you are a qualified voter who wants to vote, your name must also appear on the official voters' list which is compiled for each election.

The bill which is the subject of debate today brings to our attention the distinction in the treatment of rural and urban voters who wish to exercise their right to vote and although urban and rural voters both have the