

Government Orders

complex area, of many consultations and of close co-operation with Elections Canada.

In this bill, the government follows up on many of the committee's recommendations. It is important to say it again because these last few years, and I would even say that it is almost a tradition with this government, it has had committees table reports which have never been acted upon. In the case of the special committee on electoral reform, diligence was in order. I believe all Canadians will benefit from that.

The main thrust of this bill is to guarantee that the Canadian electoral system is more equitable and accessible. To this effect, the bill provides for a voting process by special ballot, an improved enumeration and revision process and the possibility for voters of urban polling divisions to register and vote on election day.

The bill also contains fairness provisions. For example, it limits spending by third parties. Speaking just for myself, I believe it was extremely important to set such a limit. I always believed that we must have relatively strict rules to make sure that the electoral process is fair for everyone.

We cannot afford to have a double standard, one for candidates and parties and another for third parties.

• (2050)

I have always thought that as a responsible Canadian, a responsible candidate, a responsible party, if we force ourselves to respect a law which stipulates we must not spend more than a certain amount or conduct polls or advertising outside certain periods, the same restrictions should apply to all taxpayers and all those who are interested in the electoral process.

It would be too easy at this stage to use as an excuse freedom of speech and some court decisions and to say that this could violate the freedom of speech. I think that in a system like ours in which Elections Canada, our electoral system has proved its effectiveness not only here but abroad, it is important to adopt stricter regula-

tions, at least as far as advertising by third parties is concerned. I know what the committee has undertaken, with a direct limit of \$1,000 for third parties by the way. We know very well, since the chairman told us, that in a second stage, we will come back with the whole indirect issue, the whole matter of advertising and expenses.

It is true, as the chairman pointed out, that some deficiencies were detected following court decisions. But that does not mean that in its work the committee will find magical solutions. However, we will try in the next few weeks to put in place a proposal which will allow the government to improve the current legislation and once again to make it fairer.

Other examples of improvements to the electoral system that will make it more accessible and fairer is the possibility for Canadians who have been living outside Canada for less than five years, but who intend to come back home, to vote by mail in the federal election. Canadians who live in Canada but who, for one reason or another, will not be in their riding on election day, will now be able to vote by mail.

My colleague, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, was talking about the duration of an election, that is 47 days. It is true that 47 days is still long. In committee, we mentioned the possibility of 40 days. We also talked about a maximum of 56 days or an open-ended period. I would like to remind our viewers and our colleagues who did not have the opportunity to sit on that committee that when the Chief Electoral Officer appeared before us and explained to us how it works, he told us that, ultimately, in order to work well, the electoral process must allow each and every Canadian to be able to vote, but there were a few things that we, as voters or candidates, did not know.

I think, among other things, of having a returning officer for every riding, of providing different polling stations on election day and advance polling stations. There are also the training of the election personnel, and the finding of enumerators, poll clerks and electoral