

*Access to Information*

• (1640)

These are all promises made during the election campaign. I suggest with respect that if the Conservatives were elected, and I do not think they will be because I think they are underestimating the opposition they would be facing, none of those four promises would be kept. Why should we think that this one about a judicial review will be kept so that it will be there to the advantage, as has been said, of the Minister of Communications?

I have dealt at some length, maybe too much length, with the time available aspect. However, it is rather ironic that if it had not been delayed in the committee, this bill might very well have seen the light of day in July. There might have been a judicial review today, the sort of thing that the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton was talking about.

Because it had to go back, because compromises had to be made, because other ministers had to be convinced, because attorneys general have brought forward their opposition, because police forces in some instances have brought in objections, we have what the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton called a watered down bill. I say thank God for this bill and thank God for the fact that it can be reviewed in three years. We will be able to make changes at that time when we once again form the government.

If this is a hoax on the Canadian people, it is not something that at long last the NDP can say we are using our majority to force on the Canadian public. This bill is going to be supported by the vast majority of the members of the House of Commons, people very knowledgeable in this field. Some people initiated part of this legislation when they were the governing party. Therefore, there is no hoax here. It is all out there for the people to read, to use and take advantage of to see how well it works. Where there are flaws, the flaws can be picked up and corrected.

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** It is a good beginning.

**Mr. Cullen:** It is not a good beginning, it is an excellent beginning. It is a beginning. It is an important piece of legislation.

With regard to the aspect of privacy, I was surprised at the hon. member for Burnaby cataloguing and heaping abuse on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In my opinion, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have one of the finest commissioners it has been my privilege to know in the time that I have been in the House of Commons. In attending committees and answering questions, never has there been any fuzzing of answers on the part of that individual. His answers have always been straightforward. If he believes that the police need a particular power, he is not only prepared to come forward but to explain why they need that particular power, what job they have to do and what sorts of things must be done. A general blanket condemnation of the RCMP is inappropriate at this time. Certainly there should be no attack on this commissioner who is doing an excellent job. He has a very difficult role at the present time.

The privacy bill will repeal and replace the existing privacy legislation, Part IV of the Canadian Human Rights Act. This is something the Canadian public wants to know. It is not that there is no privacy legislation. The fact is it will create a comprehensive code of fair information practices with respect to personal information held by the federal government. This code will deal with the way in which personal information is collected, used, disclosed, retained and disposed of by institutions of the federal government.

It will extend and reinforce the right of access to information about oneself held in federal files. The right of access will now apply to all personal information held by the government. The exemptions to the right of access will be more specific and, in many cases, narrower than under Part IV. A right of judicial review of refusals to provide access will be created. That part of the bill is something that warrants commendation rather than criticism.

Much of the strength of the privacy bill lies in the greatly expanded role of the privacy commissioner. The commissioner will not only be empowered to investigate and make recommendations with respect to refusals to provide access, but she will also be responsible for overseeing the way in which government institutions collect, handle, use and disclose personal information to ensure they comply with the code of fair information practices.

I do not think I have to elaborate much more on the privacy legislation. It is good legislation. I am sure the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty), who initiated a lot of what is the privacy legislation, will speak in much more glowing terms than I could ever hope to do because of his background and research on this part of the bill.

Rather than knocking, let us praise this bill. When we go across the country, let us talk about access to information. Let us also tell the Canadian public to try it out to see how it works. They can tell us where the flaws are and where we can improve it. We have the commitment that in three years those changes will be made.

I do not say we will go across the land screaming, yelling, jumping and praising this piece of legislation, but by God we should certainly get this information to the Canadian public so that they will know it is there and that they have access to it. If there are some roadblocks, they can be removed in three years.

I once again compliment the minister for having the intellectual integrity to press forward with this bill, unilaterally as it turns out, notwithstanding a lot of the criticism from the attorneys general from across the country.

**Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe):** Mr. Speaker, there is a timeliness about this bill. This evening the House of Commons will be entertained by the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) as he introduces his second budget in less than a year. We understand from leaks that at that time the government will be announcing what it intends to do about job creation.