

*Byelections***PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS**

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS ACT**AMENDMENT TO SHORTEN PERIOD WITHIN WHICH
BYELECTIONS TO BE HELD**

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot) moved that Bill C-209, to amend the House of Commons Act (vacancies), be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

Mr. Collette: Madam Speaker, in all fairness to the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Malone), and if there is unanimous consent, we should allow private members' hour to continue after six o'clock.

Madam Speaker: The House has heard the suggestion. Is that agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Malone: Madam Speaker, the intention of Bill C-209 is to bring some order to the calling of byelections where there is the appearance of there being no order. At present the situation is such that not only members of the House but also their constituents are led to believe that there might be some playing around with the calling of byelections.

It happens that from time to time an extraordinarily long time elapses, sometimes exceeding three years, before a vacancy in the House is filled. At other times there would appear to be a parallel between the calling of a byelection by the government and the result of a Gallup poll which might be favourable to the government party and thereby trigger the initiation of a signal for a byelection. It is certainly not for me to impute motives to the government in the calling of a byelection at a given time, but so long as that suspicion remains among members or, what is more important, among constituents, it behoves us as members of Parliament to establish a system whereby byelections are called in accordance with an organized plan rather than at the whim of a government, whichever government it might be.

The intention of my bill is that, in the case of a resignation, a byelection would be called no later than 90 days following the resignation; and in the case of a death it would be called no later than 135 days following the death of a member. The reason for the difference in the number of days is that it seemed prudent, as well as courteous, in drafting the bill to ensure that in the case of a death a period of mourning be allowed for in a constituency. This would allow constituents to have a period of mourning prior to the calling for nominations before a byelection takes place.

● (1720)

The intent of the bill would be nullified six months prior to the normal termination of a Parliament.

I think it is fair to say that byelections should be for the benefit of constituents who are without representation. They

ought not to be for the purpose of serving a government in power, whatever its motives might be. In moving this motion I want it to be understood that our first and primary concern—and I hope it would be that among members of all parties in this chamber—should be the citizens of Canada who in some instances have gone unduly long without representation.

I bring this bill forward as a result of some personal experience.

Mr. Benjamin: Don't talk out your own bill.

Mr. Malone: When I was first elected to this House by the constituents of Battle River, I came here following the unfortunate death of my predecessor, Harry Kuntz. For more than a year his riding was without representation. I recognized the great frustration there was in my constituency when constituents did not have a member to whom they could go or someone upon whom they could call.

Because I come from a province which has traditionally voted for a party not aligned with the government of the day, the appearance was that the reason my constituents did not have representation was that such representation would not be of assistance to the government. Therefore, a byelection was held off.

In Canada presently the writ must be announced within six months of the time a seat is declared vacant. The unfortunate part is that even if that were adequate, the government could announce the byelection for any date, including four or five years down the road. That means that we could wait as long as six months to hear when a byelection would take place. That can and does happen, as it did in the case some years ago when the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) came to this House. He came following a byelection which was the result of the passing of his predecessor, but the byelection was called for a date which would have to be at a time in which a general election would already have had to have been called.

Under today's parliamentary system the government is not bound at all ever to fill a vacancy if it should so choose. I think that leaves us in a position where our citizens are not well served. They are given no assurance or guarantee of their parliamentary system, and I think it behoves us to take into account the fact that constituents across Canada require a greater guarantee.

I have been a member of Parliament for six years. I have reflected for that period of time upon bringing some information to this House with respect to byelections. During the time I have been a member of Parliament 18 constituencies have been without members of Parliament for more than 200 days. In that same six-year period seven constituencies were without members of Parliament or representation for more than 300 days, and five were without representation for more than a year.

We should take into account the frustration there is in constituencies. All of us here need simply to reflect upon our own workloads to know the number of people who contact us