

*Government Orders*

I particularly think it will help those who are unable to get to the polls on election day for one reason or another, who are shut in and who know that they will be unable to go. They may apply for and obtain a special ballot and mark it by some arrangement from their house and mail it in. I believe people will be able to take special ballots to people under this arrangement. The details have not been worked out. If that happens, again it will make voting easier.

Canadians who know they will be away from their constituency on the day of the election will be able to do this. Indeed, people who have been left off the list may be able to get on the list and vote by way of special ballot.

There are a series of changes that this law will make which will make it easier for Canadians to vote no matter where they are.

We have already heard from the member for Calgary West about the additional voting rights granted to non-resident Canadians. There is a restriction there of no more than five years absence from Canada and if the voter stays out longer than that, the right to vote is lost. We will survive that. I think that will work.

Certain members of this House have expressed concern about the issue. The hon. member for Saint-Denis certainly did. One of the concerns is the enforcement of the provisions of this act outside the country. It will be difficult to charge an elector outside of Canada with fraud for example. It will be difficult to enforce the provisions respecting expenditure by political parties and candidates outside the country.

Aside from that certainly if the parties or candidates are spending and are caught spending money outside the country, that can be used as grounds for a prosecution here if in so doing they exceed the limits imposed by the act. All in all I believe the new provisions respecting special ballots will help Canadians and will improve the way the act is applied throughout the country.

Generally, the changes that are proposed to this act are reasonable ones. Many are very technical, as the hon. member for Calgary West stated in his remarks and I do not propose to go through them in detail. As I have indicated, we support the bill in principle and will continue to try to make the changes in the areas that I have mentioned in committee and at the report stage.

As the hon. member said, the committee is continuing its work in reviewing the royal commission's report. We are working on the rules relating to enforcement of the act, the financial limits and the reimbursement procedures for candidates and for the political parties and finally the rules in respect of broadcasting dealing with the number of minutes, for example, allocated to each of the political parties.

We believe those changes are important. We believe they need to be in place in time for the election. We in this party will continue to work with the members of the committee from the government and from the New Democratic Party to see that those changes to the law are brought to this House in a timely manner so that they can be incorporated in a bill and adopted before the election.

Third is phase three. I recognize the government feels that somehow phase three is likely to take place before the next election. That could happen but frankly, I have doubts. There are many relatively controversial items in phase three. It is so close to an election. It is hard to start talking about redistribution of seats for example in the weeks or months immediately preceding an election when we know we are going to have to make changes after it.

My guess is phase three is not going to happen until after the next election. One suspects the composition of the House which could be quite different after that election might make a difference in the approach that is taken to phase three.

• (2005)

Phase three might even become something bigger and might result in some changes to phases one and two. After an electoral experience we may be better able to point out the shortcomings that we have suggested are present in phase one and which are not dealt with at the amendment stage in this House. We may find that some of the ideas we have put forward do not work and we may have to make changes in them as a result of that experience.

We think on the whole the measures contained in Bill C-114 represent a significant advance in improving the electoral law of Canada. We are glad to be able to assist