

Government Orders

the motion I will explain what I believe to be the strengths and the weaknesses of the bill and then I will suggest some changes.

There is an attempt here to make the political process more open. This is a necessary move, given that there are today few professions despised more than a political career. There is a good reason for this sorry fact. Constituents in my riding of Calgary Southeast have told me time and time again that they want to be included in the governance of their country. They want to have decisions made that reflect their wishes and that benefit their best interests. These Canadians are tired of a government that ignores them and succumbs to the special interests of powerful lobbyists. Part of the mandate that members of my party have received is to put an end to this disempowerment.

In my last town hall meeting we were discussing the issue of criminal justice reform when a man rose to express his concerns. He challenged me when he said to all in attendance that their input would not make any difference, that politicians were not interested in hearing what constituents had to say, and that if politicians did hear the message was ultimately ignored. That was pretty harsh criticism. All of us here should take note that Canadians remain frustrated and worried about where their country is going.

• (1320)

It is often said that perception is reality. In the case of disempowered Canadians the opposite is true. In fact reality was perceived. My colleagues on this side of the House in the Reform Party have a comprehensive package of policy proposals that will change that cynical reality. Our proposals will give the power back to the constituents where it rightfully belongs.

The government has borrowed another idea from the Reform Party by allowing Bill C-43 to go to committee prior to second reading. It is easy therefore for me to support the motion when it has come so clearly right out of our blue book.

The motion engenders everything that Reform stands for when we speak of opening up the political system and making access to the political process more transparent. As well, the intent of the government to make amendments to the Lobbyists Registration Act, the LRA, is to require lobbyists to disclose more information to the public. I applaud some of these changes for they too are right out of the Reform blue book.

Maybe I should send a copy of the blue book to the other side of the House because we hear there is confusion among Liberal backbenches as to what legislation will be brought forward next in the House. We can end their guesswork. They need only check our blue book to find out what the government plans to do next.

What is happening in the House this session is quite interesting. We have Liberals trying to pretend that they are Reformers.

They recognize that our policies are those Canadians want to see enacted in legislation. However and unfortunately we see what happens when Liberals try to be Reformers. They cannot get things quite right. They tried for criminal justice reform but because they are not Reformers they miss the big picture. The same thing is happening with Bill C-43. The Liberals are missing the big picture. Making changes to the LRA and appointing an ethics counsellor are fine as far as they go, but typically they go off track in some important respects and they definitely do not go far enough.

Bill C-43 will give the ethics counsellor the power to require lobbyists to report lobbying fees with respect to government contracts. In giving the ethics counsellor this power the bill fails to define clearly his authority. A question comes immediately to mind such as: Under what circumstances will the ethics counsellor require a lobbyist to disclose this information? The circumstances appear to be discretionary and given that the counsellor reports directly to the Prime Minister he may be subject to undue influence.

Bill C-43 is a classic example of a bill with much bark but no bite. There is a simple solution to the problem. The bill should require all lobbyists to disclose all donations and fees received over \$500 and expenditures over \$10. They should be required to file quarterly reports and to file year to date information as well. This process is currently used in the United States. It appears to be an appropriate and adequate model.

In the last Parliament another bill on the same topic died on the Order Paper. It was coincidentally also labelled Bill C-43. The reason that bill did not go anywhere was that it created another layer of bureaucracy. We were assured during the briefing on the bill yesterday that Bill C-43 would not do that. We have yet again more verbal assurance from the government. We know what happens when we get verbal assurances, do we not? We need only to look to the Ministry of Canadian Heritage to confirm that.

Bill C-43 would appoint the existing assistant deputy registrar general as the ethics counsellor. However we are told that he will keep his old job as the ADRG. Now I ask: Will he receive two salaries? He presently requires a staff of 25 to fulfil his responsibilities as ADRG. Now that he has two jobs it would seem that his staff will have a lot more work to do. There are only three possibilities here. He could do one job terribly. He could do both jobs poorly. Or, he could hire more staff in order to do both jobs well. I suspect he will want to do both jobs well. At least I hope he will.

• (1325)

How much more money will his office require to fulfil his new responsibilities? Can the government tell us how much this new ethics counsellor will cost the Canadian taxpayer? Despite the