

payments; he is 10 per cent short on everything, and he will tell you that. He is not going to suggest that over all we will save \$1 billion by making these changes. He will tell you exactly how they affect him, and as his representative one should know this. There should be a period when you spend some time at home.

I do not want to go on at any great length, but I think this is a very important subject. In many ways we are not now representing our people. This government is bringing a referendum bill before the House. A lot of members here think we should have referendums on many subjects. If we have referendums we do not need parliament. Parliament is a place where we sit representing our constituents. Hopefully if hon. members have any brains of their own they can make decisions. If they do not make the right decisions they will get tossed out. If they do make the right decisions perhaps they will get re-elected. They should remember they are the representatives of the people they are representing. It is suggested that we should pass this bill on referendums and hold a referendum on this matter and on that matter.

I think it would behoove all members to send the subject matter of this motion to the committee. I am sure the committee would make changes. Every member here would likely have some worth-while proposition to suggest in respect of this bill. When we consider it over a period of time and send it back to the House, then perhaps we will have something that will help solve the problems which have developed here over the last three or four years and which have been highlighted by that crystal ball idea for calling the next general election, if there ever is to be one.

Mr. Gilbert Parent (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member for Eglinton (Mr. Parker) spoke a little while ago he suggested that perhaps on this side of the House we were filled with arrogance and this arrogance was transmitted around the House by spores on the wind. I can tell him that there is not only a little wind over here, there is a lot of hot air over there and it seems to me that the arrogance has spread across to that side as well. The hon. member for Eglinton made mention of birds and bird shot. Since coming to this House he made his maiden speech within two days, and has been like a bull in a china shop. I think that if the birds get bird shot it might be appropriate or fair for me to say that the bulls get bull shot.

You will be happy to note, Mr. Speaker, as will my colleague, the hon. member for Cochrane (Mr. Stewart), that 80 per cent of the people in Canada seem to agree there should be a federal election every four years. When they were asked whether they would approve or disapprove of the suggestion that there should be a federal election as a mandatory thing every four years unless a defeat in the House of Commons required an earlier election, 80 per cent nationally approved.

It would seem to me, as expressed by my colleague, the hon. member for Cochrane, and the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters), that there are many people in Canada who agree that there should be a federal election every four years. As a

matter of fact just a month ago a man by the name of Harry Midgley wrote in the *Edmonton Journal* the following:

It should be compulsory to have the general election on a prescribed date. And it should be illegal to call a general election before that date, with the single exception that it should be obligatory for a general election to be called if the government of the day is defeated in the House on a vote of confidence.

Indeed, there should be a limitation even with respect to the latter provision. It should be stipulated that there must be a dissolution and a general election following such a vote of no confidence—unless some other person or party is able to form a government that can command a vote of confidence in this House.

Under the present (not very ancient) system the right to decide when a general election shall be called is almost totally at the personal discretion of the prime minister or premier, subject only to the requirement that he must call the election within the span set by law as the maximum length of the life of a parliament or a legislature.

I submit this puts an enormous amount of power in the hands of any premier or Prime Minister. They already have a great deal of power under the workings of our modern parliamentary systems. Some say that the power to decide when a general election shall be held gives the party in power an unfair advantage over other parties. It enables the party in power to contrive situations, by the timing of legislation and announcements, or by other things like that to work up different issues, in which the atmosphere for electioneering could be especially favourable to the government. What is wrong with that? Why should a government go out and call an election when it knows it is going to be defeated? That just does not make sense. What we would be doing is giving all the advantage to the other side. This would be like saying that any time we wanted to make a decision as the government we should say no, let us not allow that because we really do not want to govern, we want to give that opportunity to the other side. I suggest that is just not a realistic stance.

Having a predictable and fixed date for an election would allow everybody to plan and prepare properly for the election. It would help to reduce the elements of uncertainty which tend to distort the democratic system at election time. It would help to ensure that our system of elections serves the interests of democracy.

Earlier, the hon. member mentioned some of the reasons why we should have fixed terms. There are two main reasons which I would like to dwell on at this time. One reason for advocating a subterm is that it would give individual members of parliament, especially the government backbenchers, a greater say in policy formulation.

● (1742)

With a set term the defeat of a piece of government legislation would not necessarily result in the defeat of the government, as custom would seem to dictate at the present, although that statement must be qualified in particular instances. Thus, a government backbencher would no longer necessarily be confronted with a choice of either voting for a piece of legislation that comes up, although he probably agrees with 90 per cent of the legislation put forth by his government because he has had a chance to discuss it in caucus, in committee, and even with special groups who may present briefs. In such a situation the backbencher would be listened to