

*Private Members' Business*

I don't think there is any doubt what is intended here. It is trying to make members of Parliament more responsible and responsive to their constituents who sent them here. That is indeed very laudable.

I do have grave concerns though about the proposal myself. My concerns are as follows:

[*Translation*]

When they elected us to the House, our constituents expected us to speak on their behalf, to inform this House of their grievances, their needs. They elected us because they wanted us, as individuals, to sit in the House of Commons. Because of our political affiliation? Yes, partly, but to what extent? It is impossible to know. Because of our personal experience? Some of us had been elected to some other office previously. This is my case, I was an MPP, I sat on municipal council for a number of years. Others have different personal experience. Finally, we are elected for our stand on some issues. Is the candidate for or against a major project within a given riding? Is the member, or rather the Liberal candidate, for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell in favour of a new bridge in the riding? What is he advocating on a given subject?

It is based on all these considerations that constituents choose to elect or to reject a given candidate.

[*English*]

Having said that, we parliamentarians in the House of Commons are faced with the situation where a member may cross the floor. It is not something that happens very often, considering the number of people in this great chamber, but it does happen from time to time. If a member crosses the floor under this bill, then that member would have to go back to the electors and ask for their consent for having crossed the floor.

I have some concerns about that proposition. First of all, we have what is known as responsible government in this country. That is not an adjective to describe certain qualities of the Prime Minister. Responsible government means a very specific thing in the kind of parliamentary system that we have, as we all know. It means a government that stays in power so long as it enjoys the confidence of the majority of members of this House. I believe it is important that Parliament be structured this way.

Let us remember what happened in the United States, for instance, in the 1970s when a certain president finally resigned from office and virtually had to be taken out of the place kicking and screaming. Under our parliamentary system, if a particular Prime Minister was no longer wanted by members of his own party to such a degree that they would be willing to risk their own seats on it, then they could collectively vote non-confidence in the government.

• (1750 )

That of course would get rid of that particular government if members felt the government was that bad. It is possible under the system we have now.

This bill does the exact opposite. It structures political parties in an even tighter knit than they are already. Someone asked a while ago in a speech what happens if a political party expels a member. That is certainly a possibility. It has been known to have happened in the past. There are other concerns. What happens if a member's views cannot be reconciled with the political party? Then, some say, he or she should go back to the electors and ask permission to sit in a different caucus.

Let us extend that a couple of notches further. What happens if the particular political party has changed its views but the member has kept the same views that he or she had before? He may not have made any change at all. Why should that particular member have to resign his seat and ask the consent of the electors to continue to do what he or she was doing already?

It is a difficult situation and a very fascinating one to be discussing. I am pleased we are having this non-partisan debate. It is not a structured one in any way and is a very healthy one. Perhaps we should use this day as a model for future debates, real private members' debates.

I am concerned about anything that changes or upsets the delicate balance we have in Parliament. We as members can, by a simple majority vote at virtually any time, defeat a government in this country if that is our wish. I am not going to describe what my particular wish would be at the moment. You could probably guess that and so could most Canadians. That is not the point in this debate. We are describing the balance we have in terms of what can or cannot be done with supporting or not supporting the government.