

Conflict of Interest

Mr. Nunziata: Madam Chairman, the Hon. Member says that a cocaine spoon is no different from any other spoon. Has he ever tried to eat Shreddies from a cocaine spoon? There is one use for a cocaine spoon and that is for the purpose of using cocaine.

Mrs. Sparrow: Space-size Shreddies.

Mr. Nunziata: Yes, space-size Shreddies. Seriously speaking, to set the record straight, I was on the committee that dealt with the Private Member's Bill to outlaw drug paraphernalia. The New Democratic Party did not participate at any of the meetings. There was not a single New Democratic Party Member who attended the meetings. In addition to that, they tried to obstruct in this House the passage of the legislation which would outlaw drug paraphernalia. I say that only to set the record straight.

The Assistant Deputy Chairman: Order. I must call the committee to order. That which happens in standing committees does not have a place here. The rule of relevancy is being abused today and I believe we should get back to the Bill we are studying.

● (1610)

Clause 1 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill reported, concurred in, read the third time and passed.

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MEMBERS OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF COMMONS CONFLICT OF INTEREST ACT

MEASURE TO ENACT

Hon. Doug Lewis (for the Prime Minister) moved that Bill C-114, an Act to provide for greater certainty in the reconciliation of the personal interests and duties of office of Members of the Senate and of the House of Commons, to establish a Conflict of Interest Commission and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate today in the debate on Bill C-114, which is known as the Members of the Senate and of the House of Commons Conflict of Interest Act. This Bill is important not only to Parliamentarians themselves, to whom it is principally directed, but also to the Canadian public who want the operation of their Government to work properly, fairly and above reproach for the benefit of all Canadians.

I believe it is fair to say that at all levels we want that for our democratically elected institutions. Canadians are concerned about the issue of ethics in government and high standards of behaviour in Canadian public life. I suggest that no one Party has a monopoly on that concern, nor does any one Party have a monopoly on solutions. We must work together to develop these solutions.

Because of these concerns and the public interest in the integrity in the Government decision-making process, this has given rise to ever increasing demands for openness and accountability in the conduct of Government. Parliament and all of its Members, both in the House of Commons and the Senate, is under an intense and very legitimate scrutiny, scrutiny by the media and by the people of Canada, on this very important issue.

Our Government welcomes this scrutiny with all of its consequences. It is right and appropriate that we who hold public office should be judged against very high standards of conduct, standards which Canadians believe demonstrate the health, vigour and integrity of our parliamentary democracy.

The principle that no one in public office should use that office to further his or her private interests is fundamental to those standards and to our system of democratic parliamentary Government. This basic principle is one which the Bill before us is designed to uphold and to strengthen.

[Translation]

Madam Speaker, the Bill before the House of Commons today seeks to strike a delicate but necessary balance: to preserve and respect the individual responsibility and privacy of every Member of Parliament, while maintaining and promoting the highest standards of conduct among all Parliamentarians in the performance of their duties.

[English]

As we all understand, and as Chief Justice Parker noted in his report to the Government on the issue of conflict of interest, ethical conduct is fundamentally a matter of personal conscience and individual behaviour. In his comments on this question, Chief Justice Parker said "Public trust and confidence in the integrity of Government depends upon the integrity of individual public office holders and their individual sense of honour".

[Translation]

Canadians have a right to expect Members of the House of Commons and Senators to be persons of honour and integrity. The purpose of these new proposals to deal with conflicts of interest is to help those who are well-intentioned to conform to our standards, while at the same time as far as possible respecting the right of those who choose to serve the people of Canada to a minimum of privacy.

In short, Madam Speaker, this piece of legislation is unprecedented in Canada's federal public sector. It is unprecedented in that its purpose is to help Members of Parliament to avoid conflict of interest situations. It is unprecedented because it provides for administrative assistance, and it is unprecedented because it invites all Parliamentarians to close ranks and show the public that we are determined to maintain the highest standards of conduct in Canadian public life. There is, of course, other legislation besides this Bill that deals with the matter.