

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

• (10:10 p.m.)

I hope the House will not mind if I take a moment or two to pay tribute to a person who is recognized as being largely responsible for this achievement in Manitoba. I believe this person is known to my hon. friend, the President of the Privy Council, Dr. Isabel MacArthur, a woman in her early fifties who has been a victim of multiple sclerosis for nearly a decade and who pursued a very active career before she became incapacitated, has been working from her bed on this issue of votes for disabled persons. She has written a great many letters to various persons in Manitoba, seeking support for the change that has now been accomplished there. Members of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections of this House have received letters from her, as have various members of the federal government and various officials here in Ottawa. After bill 38 was passed in Manitoba she wrote a letter to Premier Schreyer. This was in October, and this is what she said:

Dear Sir:

Thank you for the 2nd part of Bill 38 which allows voting by mail. I hope that the Federal government will take a "Leaf from Manitoba's Book."

Sincerely
(Dr.) Isabel MacArthur

I want to read a sentence or two from the letter Premier Schreyer sent to this lady, also in October. At the end of his first paragraph he wrote:

I believe the passage of this measure was due in no small part to your own determined efforts.

After indicating that he was forwarding certain material to some of us here in Ottawa, he concluded by saying:

With kind regards and my good wishes to a very gallant lady.

I join in that tribute paid by Premier Schreyer to this outstanding Manitoban, Dr. Isabel MacArthur, and I hope that the appeal she has been making to the federal government and to the members of our Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections will have the same successful outcome that has attended her efforts in Manitoba.

After all, Mr. Speaker, the purpose of an election is to enable all citizens to express their view by casting their vote. When people cannot get to the polls I think we ought to make arrangements so that their votes can be counted. I believe this ought to apply in particular to those people who cannot get to the polls through no fault of theirs, particularly when they are bed-ridden or unable to get

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

out at all. Dr. MacArthur once made the statement that she often wondered why people did not do something about matters of this sort. The time came when she realized that it was up to her to do that something. She made the effort in Manitoba and succeeded. I join with others in paying tribute to her and I hope the federal government will also look sympathetically at this proposal and make an appropriate recommendation so that when the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections makes its report we shall have an amendment to The Canada Elections Act that will enable those who cannot get to the polls, and particularly those who cannot get to the polls because of physical incapacity, to vote, either by mail or by proxy, in all federal elections.

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) indicated, Dr. MacArthur's appeal comes with greater force to me because she has been a long-standing friend of my family in Winnipeg. I first met her when I was a boy. Her idea has force. I am also glad to support her idea from a personal standpoint.

As the House knows, the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections has already commenced studies of the Elections Act, including the changes in this regard. I have given notice of a motion to authorize the committee in the present session to continue that study. During the last session I had already recommended to the chairman of that committee and to members of this party on the committee that they give special attention to the question of absentee voting. I was referring not only to absentee voting in the case of those whom I regard as being most meritorious in deserving consideration because of their physical incapacity, but to the absentee votes of other people who for a variety of reasons would not be able to exercise their franchise. It would not matter whether they are resident abroad or whether there are difficulties preventing their voting at the advanced poll in Canada.

Hon. members will recall the committee recommended against the permanent voters' list scheme for Canada, and it must be recognized a permanent voters list would certainly have facilitated absentee voting. I still regard absentee voting as possible and I am very hopeful the committee will give particular priority to seeking a solution to this question to facilitate absentee voting. I repeat in public what I already recommended in private, that