

running to be premier of that province, will do extremely well in the election campaign. I wish her very well as I am sure all members of the House do. That is a short campaign. It is going to be in one month. There is no earthly reason why the Canadian election campaign cannot be shortened to that length of time.

We are told by the Chief Electoral Officer that 47 days is the minimum he can do. The government did not press the issue and accepted it. However it has refused to put a maximum on it. The government House leader mumbled something about constitutional rights of the Prime Minister, that it would require a constitutional change to somehow alter that. What rubbish. There is no evidence of that at all. I would have liked to have questioned him on it but unfortunately I did not get the chance when he was before our committee.

We support a further change to this act that would restrict the length of campaigns to 40 days which even then is long but it is a lot shorter than what we are now dealing with. Canadians deserve a shorter election. It would reduce costs. It would ensure that the Canadian taxpayer gets a little better bang for the buck. The parties would not have to raise so much money in order to operate the campaign. Limits could be reduced.

Those are the points in the bill that I think are negative.

I should mention in a brief passing the issue of prisoners' voting rights. People say: "Well in Kingston of course you are interested in prisoners' voting rights". I am interested in prisoners' voting rights. There are a lot of prisons in Kingston. There are a lot of inmates in prisons in Kingston that is for sure. In fairness also the issue was dealt with by the royal commission which made certain recommendations concerning inmate voting rights.

The committee considered the matter and made another recommendation more restrictive than that proposed by the royal commission. We know that prisoners won the right to vote in court decisions in this country and exercised that right in the referendum campaign. I want to make it very clear that the voting rights exercised by inmates during the referendum were exercised in the

riding from which the inmate came, not in Kingston nor in the riding in which the prison was located.

I think my friend from Churchill may remember the figures better than I do, but my recollection is that only 119 inmates voted in Kingston and the Islands during the referendum campaign. That was a relatively high number but it is not very many out of about 12,000 federal inmates who are in prison across this country.

Given that, my own preference would be for a longer period than this two-year restriction that the government has proposed. What the government has suggested to the House in this bill is that any person incarcerated in a federal institution would be deprived of his or her right to vote. I think that is unduly restrictive. I do not believe it is in accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which guarantees to every citizen the right to vote.

• (2000)

Inmates in penitentiaries do not lose their citizenship because they have been convicted of a crime. We do not take citizenship away for that. If we want to make that one of the punishments, let us change the Criminal Code. The charter provides that every citizen has a right to vote. It is on that basis that the courts ruled that the law taking away an inmate's right to vote was unfair and contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The new law will have to be tested in the courts, but I think the government's approach has been: "We do not want to take any criticism on this, so we will propose a Draconian law and let the courts strike it down and then we will have another free for all".

That is not the view of the Liberal Party. We suggest that the matter be taken on and dealt with in a forthright and open way in this House. I hope to move an amendment to that provision of the bill at a later stage.

I want to turn to the special ballots. As the member for Calgary West said in his speech, the provisions relating to special ballots really are fundamental changes in the law. They are going to allow all kinds of Canadians who for a host of reasons were previously unable to vote to exercise their franchise.