

support this resolution aimed at correcting only part of the problem. I believe that our handicapped and senior citizens, wherever they live in this country, should have easy and adequate access to polling stations. In this regard, I am unable to support the resolution of the Hon. Member because he is creating one inequity in his attempt to correct another.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on at length about this matter, but since many of my colleagues also wish to express their views on this Bill, I shall yield to them.

[English]

**Mr. Bill Attewell (Don Valley East):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise to speak in support of the timely and thoughtful motion put forward by the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) that all polling stations in future federal elections be accessible to the elderly and the handicapped.

The special committee which tabled its report in February of 1981 heard complaints throughout the hearings that the voting system in Canada makes it difficult for handicapped persons to travel to polling stations on election day. There are many reasons why a handicapped person may not be able to get to a polling station. First, the polling station may not be in an accessible area. As an example, it may be in a location with stairs but no elevator. Second, the handicapped person may be confined to bed and thus unable to get to a polling station. A possible cure for this may be in implementing a system such as is used in the Province of Manitoba. The Hon. Member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore (Mr. Boyer) has already referred to that idea.

Another problem faced by the elderly and the disabled in trying to exercise their right to vote is the policy of the Chief Electoral Officer to try to centralize polling stations in order to save money. This policy has caused many elderly and disabled people to lose their franchise, Mr. Speaker, and I submit that no reduction in the expenses to run the polling stations is worth disenfranchising Canadians. Another problem faced by these two groups in voting is the fact that those persons who work in a polling station are often not qualified in terms of the special needs of the handicapped or the elderly.

On page 49 and page 50 of the 1984 statutory report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, it is recommended that Section 45 of the Canada Elections Act be amended to add two provisions which would deal with some of the problems I have just outlined. First, the Chief Electoral Officer recommends that a mobile poll be set up at a number of institutions where the elderly, the handicapped or other incapacitated electors are located. The second recommendation is to allow the deputy returning officer of a polling station to take the ballot box and the necessary documents to the entrance of the polling station, or even outside the polling station, in order to allow the incapacitated elector to cast his or her vote. I am in full support of the two recommendations made by the Chief Electoral Officer.

### *The Disabled and the Handicapped*

In the interest of having another colleague of mine speak to this motion, may I just summarize by saying that by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and only by those rights that are provided, we must ensure that the handicapped and the elderly of this country are guaranteed access to polls. We should not let the cost stand in the way.

So I am in total support of the Hon. Member's motion. It is, and I stress this, time for action. But let us ensure that we do not overlook any existing problems which would work against the splendid spirit of this motion, if these problems were unresolved.

**Mr. Bob Brisco (Kootenay West):** Mr. Speaker, I have reviewed the substance of the motion of the Hon. Member. In fact, I have had the opportunity in the last while to examine a number of elements related to the Elections Act. I represent a rural riding, as does my colleague who spoke a moment ago. I must confess I am a little surprised that we are addressing ourselves in this debate to the urban rather than to the rural component, at least in part. That does give me some concern, Mr. Speaker. It always seems that the rural areas are the areas which are first to be ignored.

I think that one must recognize that there are certain hardships in terms of getting to the polls which are more evident and apparent in the rural setting than they are in the urban. After all, in an urban setting one has the opportunity of employing or utilizing a dozen or more different facilities in a given polling area to which a person can go and exercise his or her right to vote. Those kinds of provisions do not exist in the rural area. We take what we can get whether that be a school, a church, some other public building or even a private building. In fact, I recall a polling station in a private home in the small community of Paterson in my riding. So while it is fine to impose a provision for those who are handicapped or elderly in the urban areas, it does present some difficulties for those persons in the rural setting.

It has been suggested that the advance poll would more than accommodate this particular problem. But I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that that argument, while it is persuasive, cuts both ways because, really, what you are saying to the handicapped and elderly persons who would be expected to vote at the advance poll is, "You are a little different from anyone else. You have to vote at the advance poll. It doesn't matter if you have a medical appointment 200-miles removed or if you are on vacation and plan to be back on election day". Those are the difficulties which I can see will surface immediately.

In terms of the actual cost of construction or the provision for the voter to have access at the urban level, I think those costs would be much higher than at the rural level. Essentially, we are dealing with an existing building, probably with a simple modification.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest):** Order, please. The hour provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired.