

*Government Orders*

up at the polling place to find out that they have been disenfranchised and cannot vote. It was a big problem during the recent referendum, a lot of complaints.

- (1915)

This bill solves that problem in two ways. You will be able to get your name on the voters' list up to five days before voting and then you will be able to walk into the poll in rural or urban areas, the proper place, and sign up to be on the list on voting day. It may be a little inconvenient for some people perhaps. They will have to travel a little further to get on the list on voting day. It is much better for them to get on the list early but no Canadians will be disenfranchised in the next federal election simply because they did not get their names on the list in time if the House passes this bill in time and makes it the law of the land. It is a major change which will be welcomed from coast to coast.

The second change will allow people who are absent from home during critical voting periods, such as voting day, to be able to vote. That may not sound like a whole lot but let me start with the smallest part of it.

There are people who cannot make it to the polls. They have physical handicaps of one kind or another. They may be just a block or two away. Up to now they had to vote by proxy. They had to give somebody else the right to go to the polling station and vote in their place. Therefore, somebody else knew their voter intention but they had no way of knowing whether that person voted the way they wanted them to or not. It was a proxy voting situation. We are putting in place a system that will allow Canadians in that situation to cast their own ballots in their own homes. The sealed ballot will be returned for counting to an appropriate place.

That same system will apply to Canadians who are away from their ridings during the voting period. They may be looking after a sick relative in another part of the country. Their employer may put them on a course or on a temporary assignment to another part of the country. They may be seismograph crews working in isolated areas on boats and ships and things of that nature. They will be able to vote wherever they are. Let us say it is somebody from Calgary who is working in Fredericton, New Brunswick. He or she will be able to go into a returning office in Fredericton, make arrangements to be put on the voters' list in Calgary, and he or she will be

able to vote in Fredericton for the candidates in Calgary. It is unprecedented in Canadian history.

Third, but not last and not least, is that Canadians who are living abroad but planning to return to Canada and who have been living abroad for less than five years will be able to register on a permanent voters' list. So Canadians who are listening tonight, when the law is changed if you happen to be leaving the country, you would be able to register. If an election occurs in your absence you will receive a ballot and have the opportunity to cast that ballot, return it to this country and have it counted. It is a system similar to ones in most western nations that allow their citizens living abroad temporarily to vote.

This may or may not work with practice. It may require some modification in the future, but it is a bold new step recommended first of all by the commission, endorsed by the committee and presented to the House, picked up by cabinet and is now before us in the form of legislation.

The five-year limit will not apply to Canadian military personnel and dependants serving abroad. It will not apply to our diplomatic corps, those who serve Canada abroad at a civilian level and their dependants. It will not apply to provincial civil servants who serve their province abroad and to their dependants as well. This is the first time provincial civil servants have had this opportunity. There has been a system for military personnel and diplomatic personnel in the past. The system has changed somewhat but we think it will be every bit as efficient.

- (1920)

If you read the election law that sits on bookshelves today, Mr. Speaker, you will find a lot of exclusions of people who cannot vote for one reason or another. One that comes immediately to mind is judges. Under Canadian election law it has been struck down so judges are really allowed to vote but the law says they cannot.

When this new law is in place it will be restricted to two categories of people who will not be able to vote. All Canadians 18 years of age and over will be able to vote with the exception of two categories of persons. The first category will be those sentenced to a prison term of two years or longer, in other words those who have committed a crime serious enough to warrant that length of