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**OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)**

Thursday, June 15, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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**Canada Elections Act**

The House resumed from June 8 consideration of the motion that Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (political financing), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

I rise to speak to Bill C-50, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act, political financing.

I want to talk about integrity, openness, and transparency.

Several members this morning have talked about what that means and the ethical aspect of all of those elements that are intrinsic, or should be intrinsic, in each one of us, and that therefore we would not have to introduce legislation, if we merely had a moral compass.

This bill would not stop the cash for access fundraisers. The bill is about formalizing and instituting a system for cash for access fundraisers. When we look at the bill, it is silent on the very issues that the Liberals promised to address. As well, it is silent on third party financing. None of that is addressed.

When we talk about integrity and our moral compass as elected officials or as people in our society, it really behooves us to understand where that moral compass lies.

People attending these fundraisers have clearly stated on numerous occasions that they have discussed and lobbied the ministers and the **Prime Minister**, that they have had business before the government, and they were proud to speak openly about doing so.

As my colleague so eloquently laid out, it is the rationalization around why these fundraisers are taking place. It is the rationalization that the ministers and the **Prime Minister** believe this is the normal course of business. However, the \$1,500 gets people in the door and then they have access to discuss business with the **Prime Minister** and the ministers. Clearly, it does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that this is wrong.

It is wrong on so many fronts. It is wrong because the **Prime Minister** was very clear in his comments, and I will read them out, that this practice would not be undertaken, that this was sunny ways, that things would change, that the Liberals would have the most open and accountable government in history. They were going to ensure they would keep their word and promises, and Canadians would be proud of the work that was undertaken. That sounded really great.

During the election, the **Prime Minister** went around the country, and that was his message on behalf of the party. The government was going to be open, transparent, and ensure Canadians had access to the government. What he did not say was that lobbyists would have access to government and ministers for \$1,500.

The **Prime Minister** stated general principles. I will read them so we can grasp the context here. He said:

Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries must ensure that political fundraising activities or considerations do not affect, or appear to affect, the exercise of their official duties or the access of individuals or organizations to government.

There should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to politicians and political parties.

There should be no singling out, or appearance of singling out, of individuals or organizations as targets of political fundraising because they have official dealings with Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, or their staff or departments.

As we have heard over and over again, there is a litany of events where that precisely took place, not only for the ministers and parliamentary secretaries but also for the **Prime Minister**. When a statement is issued publicly, is reported on, and is distributed among the Liberal members of Parliament, that should be the defining moment where people have their moral compass intact and do not go to these events. However, that did not happen. Those events took place. The **Prime Minister** and ministers went, and business was discussed. It was quite astonishing because they were very proud of undertaking that practice.

When we talk about openness and transparency, which the government had said it would be, at every turn the language continues to be about openness and transparency. If we look at any of our freedom of information requests, the majority of it is redacted. Public servants are not permitted to speak publicly for life. The Liberals refuse to answer questions in question period, which I find astonishing because it is question period. Reports are not forthcoming to the House. The Auditor General has raised concerns regarding the lack of financial information. There was an actual refusal to give the AG documents and it impeded officials from doing their job.

We can look at the appointments process. The Liberals say it is open, transparent, and merit-based, which is further from the truth.

The Liberals promise one thing during the election and another when they are in government. The general public deserves better than that. This is about integrity and ethical behaviour, and it

starts at the top. If the Prime Minister sees nothing wrong with cash for access fundraising, how possibly can that translate to the Liberal members of Parliament? I would suggest it does not.

Producing this legislation, which really now covers the Liberals to continue this behaviour, speaks to the ethical void in the Prime Minister. If there were an actual willingness to address this issue, then the bill certainly would be more comprehensive. Furthermore, it is around following the rules. Not every situation can be legislated, but surely I would think the Prime Minister would know that when there is business before the House and when lobbyists pay \$1,500 to go to a fundraiser, it is wrong. The Liberals cannot justify it. They cannot rationalize it. Plain and simply, it is wrong. Canadians deserve far better.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, given who the member is, has she had fundraising events? In the Surrey area not in one year, but in several years, there were events, and former prime minister Stephen Harper would visit that community. My understanding is that a special group was invited to participate. I understand the member across the way also participated.

Would the member provide some information to the House on whether Stephen Harper attended those events and charged money to have access to him inside those tents?

**Ms. Dianne L. Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, I think we have to be very clear. We are talking about lobbyists who have business before the House, who are paying and are proud to publicly state that they are lobbying the Prime Minister and ministers. That is a very different context than that of the former prime minister having a barbeque and having the community members there. I, on a couple of occasions, attended. Most certainly, there were people from the community. Those lists were vetted very carefully because, on this side of the House, the Conservatives know it is wrong. It does not matter how we slice it up; it is wrong. We do not have lobbyists pay money when they have business before the House and lobby us, whether it is in a private residence or anywhere else.

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I would like to come back to something that has been mentioned several times in this debate, and that is the fact that Bill C-50 is completely pointless.

This bill seeks to publish the names of people who participated in events where they paid \$1,500 to get access to ministers and the Prime Minister, when their names will be published one day or another anyway. As my colleagues are well aware, the names of people who donate over \$200 are already published on the Elections Canada website.

Could my colleague comment on the fact that this bill seems to be just a smokescreen to give the Liberals talking points since it seeks to do something that is already being done, namely, publish the names of people who donated over \$200?

**Ms. Dianne L. Watts:**

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague articulating that very point because, through Elections Canada, the names have to be published at any rate. To put it in this piece of legislation and say we are reforming fundraising is absolute nonsense. Through this legislation, I guess they will do it more quickly, which I guess is something they want to do, and that is fine. However, at the end of the day, there are very strict guidelines and rules that have been in place for a very long time.

Elections Canada makes sure that all of those names are recorded with the amounts of money that are given to the party or to the member. That is how it has been.

I am really astonished, actually, when I look at this legislation, to actually see the relevance, but it is smoke and mirrors. They can tick a box and then say to the media, “Well, we fixed the problem.” No, they did not fix the problem. The problem is a moral issue, it is a moral compass, it is about ethics and integrity, and that is vacant in this legislation.