



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, October 31, 2002**

—  
**Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken**

## **CONTENTS**

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 31, 2002

The House met at 10 a.m.

[English]

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*Prayers*

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## INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[English]

### SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (A) 2002-2003

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting Supplementary Estimates (A) of the sums required for the fiscal year ending on March 31, 2003, was presented by the Hon. President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker of the House.

**Mr. John Williams:** I would like to ask whether the message from the Governor General which was just read is in proper order.

•(1005)

**The Speaker:** As far as the Speaker can tell, it is.

\* \* \*

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 10 petitions.

\* \* \*

### PUBLIC SAFETY ACT, 2002

**Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-17, an act to amend certain acts of Canada, and to enact measures for implementing the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, in order to enhance public safety.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP ACT

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-18, An Act respecting Canadian citizenship.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

**Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House a report from the Canadian branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association concerning the 48th CPA conference which was held from September 6 to 14, 2002, in Windhoek, Namibia.

**Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the 9th General Assembly of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians Conference on the Environment and Development held in Seoul, Korea, in July 2002.

I also have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the 23rd General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization, IPO, held in Hanoi, Vietnam, in September 2002.

•(1010)

**Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, on behalf of the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis who could not be here at the moment, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly's 11th annual session in Berlin, Germany, from July 6 to 10, 2002.

\* \* \*

### YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

**Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-281, an act to amend the Young Offenders Act.

*Routine Proceedings*

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am reintroducing this bill that would amend the Young Offenders Act to make an offence set out in section 7.2 as a hybrid offence. It deals with parental accountability with respect to signed undertakings to supervise court imposed conditions for interim release.

The bill was originally introduced in the 36th Parliament as Bill C-260 and as C-235 in the previous session of this Parliament. The Minister of Justice has recognized the value of this legislation as it has been incorporated verbatim in the new youth criminal justice act slated to take effect on April 1, 2003.

While some may say it is therefore redundant, it is my intention to keep this proposed amendment on the order paper as long as the Young Offenders Act remains the law of the land.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

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**IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT**

**Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-282, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am reintroducing legislation to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. It was Bill C-434 in the previous session.

This amendment would permit an immigration officer to require a foreign national applying for a visitor's visa to provide security as a condition of the issuance of that visa. It would also provide for immediate removal from Canada if the visa conditions or requirements of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act were not complied with.

This bill is a direct result of working with my constituents whose family members living abroad have repeatedly been denied visitor visas for a variety of reasons. While my bill would not eliminate the possibility of visitors remaining in Canada beyond the approved period, it would provide the statutory means for their swift removal. My bill would give many Canadians the opportunity to enjoy family occasions together with loved ones from overseas. I look forward to debating this bill further in the House.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**TAX CONVENTIONS IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2002**

**Hon. Lucienne Robillard (for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance)** moved that Bill S-2, An Act to implement an agreement, conventions and protocols concluded between Canada and Kuwait, Mongolia, the United Arab Emirates, Moldova, Norway, Belgium and Italy for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion and to amend the enacted text of three tax treaties, be read the first time.

(Motion agreed to, and bill read the first time)

[*English*]

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as per the notice we served 48 hours ago, I move that the second report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House on Tuesday, October 29, be concurred in. The report deals with the election of chairs of committees.

●(1015)

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Brossard—La Prairie.

As the House knows, this is the report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This is an unusual committee. As members realize, but members of the public may not, it is a committee which is very central to the operation of the House. Its name is procedure and House affairs and obviously it is greatly seized with the procedures of the House on a day to day basis but, in particular, the procedures of the House as they are enunciated in the standing orders.

As the House affairs side of the title suggests, it is very much seized with the effectiveness of the House of Commons and greatly seized with the effectiveness of individual members of Parliament.

A great deal of the work of members of Parliament is their work in committee, and members take great pride in that. Many of them at the moment deeply regret the fact that the vast majority of the committees are not functioning yet, believe it or not, after so many weeks. It is my hope, as chair of the committee, and the hope of other members, that the committees operate as quickly as possible and as soon as possible.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs deals with the operations of the House of Commons. In the last year or so I have to say that members on both sides of the House on that committee have been very involved with the question of modernizing and reforming the House of Commons in various ways.

For example, it was this committee that made it possible for every sitting of every committee of the House to be televised. This was not the case before. As the House knows, we have always had committees that could be televised and we have rooms for special televised hearings but now, as a result of the work of this committee, it is possible to televise any committee meeting. We think that is a step forward. It has been a very progressive group.

Also in the last House the committee tabled a report, which it has retabled, on the reform of private members' business. Again, this is something which has to do with the very grassroots operation of this place and with the way individual members function. I think that report on private members' business is a considerable step forward. It is my hope, now that it has been reintroduced, that we will move forward on many if not all of the reforms suggested in that report.

*Routine Proceedings*

I also have to say that this is not a normal committee. Its members include all five whips of the House. As well, the membership often includes House leaders and parliamentary secretaries on the government side. It is a very unusual committee. When the committee meets the parties are, in a very real sense, talking to each other directly, through their whips and other party officers, about the operations of the House today and for the future. Therefore it does not make decisions lightly. In my experience as chair, the members on all sides work very hard and do their best to maintain the health and quality of what goes on in this place.

In this case, the report that is before us proposes that rather than an open ballot at the first meeting of the year of any standing committee, that there be a secret ballot to elect the chair and the two vice-chairs of the 17, 18 or whatever number of standing committees we have.

The current practice, except in two cases, is that the chair and one vice-chair are from the government side, and one vice-chair is from the opposition side. Normally there is a show of hands and people are elected. I was elected in that way two or three weeks ago.

In my case, as far as I could tell sitting there when the clerk was conducting the election, I was elected unanimously but the members had to indicate by a show of hands who it was they were voting for.

The proposal in the report is for that process to take place in secret through a secret ballot. The report was brought forward by a majority of the committee. I think, as everyone knows, it was a majority which included government members and opposition members.

I want you to know, Madam Speaker, that the report had majority support but there were divisions in the committee and amendments were put during the debate. The amendments included the fact that the distribution of chairs and vice-chairs remain exactly the same as I have just explained: a chair usually from the government, except in special cases; a vice-chair from the government and a vice-chair from the opposition.

One amendment also included the provision for a review at the end of a year so we could see how the new procedure would operate and then there would be a review. At that time the committee and certainly the House would have a chance to re-address the matter.

In my view, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs gave this matter very full and open examination. It engaged in as passionate a debate as I have seen in my time as chair of that committee, which is normally, I have to say, a fairly dispassionate committee. This morning I am moving concurrence in the report which I tabled earlier this week.

● (1020)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

He said that the committee worked hard and gave the matter very full and very open examination. Today, he is recommending that we adopt the motion he has put forward.

Would he agree with me that the matter should be put to us without the government making any amendments? This way,

members would have the opportunity to vote immediately on the matter to ensure things get done properly, as the committee has already done its job. I cannot see the committee acting any differently. This is simple, this is the democratic way. The chair will be elected by secret ballot, and the matter will be closed. It would work better than having amendments and having the government meddle with the motion put forward by the Chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Adams:** Madam Speaker, as the member knows, as soon as the committee had completed its deliberations, as soon as I possibly could, I tabled the report. I think it was the very same day. At exactly that same time I tabled written notice of the motion that I am moving now.

The member asks about amendments to this. It is my hope that now here in the House of Commons there will be as full a debate as we had in our committee. We are the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I think we should abide by the procedures of the House of Commons and the standing orders that exist for debates of this type.

**Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, the chairman of the procedure and House affairs committee mentioned that the vast number of committees were not sitting. I wonder why they would be sitting when we have a government that has scheduled House business this week alone with two days taken up with take note debates, two opposition days and a Friday, a half a day, for government business.

Next week it is the same thing: two supply days, motions from the last Parliament.

The government must be embarrassed that it had a throne speech, which took two weeks out of Parliament's time, and then recessed. We came back and we still have not seen one piece of new legislation. Everything is from the last Parliament. Even the citizenship bill that was introduced this morning came from the last Parliament.

The government is in chaos and yet we have a committee that is working and functioning properly, which has come to a conclusion by a majority vote, and now the government is using some trickery this morning to send it back to a committee for a couple of weeks. It knows that in the meantime all the committees will be struck, so the intent of that committee will not take place until the next session.

It is a sham. I wonder how the chairman of our committee can accept that type of nonsense from the leadership of his government.

● (1025)

**Mr. Peter Adams:** Madam Speaker, as you know, both of the people who have spoken so far are members of the committee. One is the party whip of the NDP and the other is the House leader of the Alliance. That gives the House an indication of the nature of the committee that I have tried to describe.

In terms of the work of the House, I do not particularly want to debate that issue, but there are six bills before the House and some of those bills are ready to go to committee.

*Routine Proceedings*

As the member knows, as chair of the committee I do not very often interfere in the debate and do not often get a chance to debate, but as chair of this committee I take it very personally that I am responsible for the working conditions of members of Parliament. I truly do.

When I am in the chair I play the role of the chair to the limit of the possibility. This does not mean, Madam Speaker, if you will excuse the term, that I am sort of a political eunuch, because I do have my own views. Just imagine 18 committees with 16 members each, and my arithmetic may not very good, but that is 200 or 300 members of Parliament who could be working. By the way, either at the time the Chamber is sitting or in the evenings, or in times of breaks, the committees could be operating.

My colleague and I sit very close to each other on the committee. As a member of Parliament and, in particular, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I consider that my first duty is to see to it, as I have done today, to introduce the report, which may well improve the working conditions of those committees, and to keep the committee functioning as well as I can.

My second duty is to ensure that committees do start their work as soon as possible so members can occupy themselves with the topics that interest them most.

**Mr. Jacques Saada (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to move the following amendment. I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and by substituting the following:

"the second report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be referred back to the committee for the purpose of reconsidering its recommendations".

And that the committee report to the House thereon within fifteen sitting days.

**Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, it is hard to believe what is going on here. I noticed that some people who were on TV this morning are probably frustrated right now. It is one thing to be in the opposition and be a little frustrated to witness this unbelievable attack on democracy, but I wonder what some of the other folks are feeling.

There was a legitimate vote yesterday in the procedure and House affairs committee. The chairman of that committee just said that the people who have spoken thus far are members of that committee. Well, I am not. I am just observing this from the outside and it is unbelievable that they did not get their way in that committee, shucks, but now they will just throw it over to the big one and they have 15 days just to tromp on people and tell them to behave or else.

Madam Speaker, you are a member of that party, a member of the government. I appreciate that you are trying to be neutral in the Chair, but it seems to me that if people from the outside are looking at what is happening here, their guts should be churning, quite frankly. What will happen is that it will come back to bite them and it probably will not be very long because we are in for a new regime here. We have heard the speeches about the democratic deficit and we have seen the red book but what we are seeing here flies in the face of that kind of nonsense.

Someone who just stood up to speak was given 10 minutes and read some edict from somebody who said that it did not go our way so we will have 15 days to strong arm some of these people.

How, in good conscience, can the member stand up and read an amendment to the motion like that, that they are going to go back and give it another kick at the can? What about inside his caucus when he is facing a possible revolt of two people who misbehaved, in their books, yesterday? I say good on them. What will he say to those people in the next 15 days?

• (1030)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Saada:** Madam Speaker, I find it interesting that the member for Edmonton North should be the one talking to me about revolt. How quickly she forgets her history.

What she does not seem to know, or in any case will not indicate, is that in this institution of ours, there is a process whereby decisions made by a committee become recommendations made to the House as a whole. It is up to the House as a whole to decide.

To assume that all of the committee report must automatically be concurred in, as she does, is to deprive the members of the House who are not on the committee the opportunity to express their views on the matter. It is basically taking away their democratic right to speak on such issues. She knows it full well; she is playing petty party politics.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I have something to say about petty politics. I believe petty politics is what took place this morning in Ottawa, when the Prime Minister called all his members, to call them to order before entering the House of Commons chamber. That is petty politics. That is democracy lost in our country.

[*English*]

It is a shame that the Prime Minister called all his members in before Parliament opened this morning to put the whip to them again, which makes an attack on democracy. Members of Parliament are intelligent enough, and some of the members opposite are intelligent enough, to vote on the side of the opposition because they are sick and tired of the Prime Minister whipping them every time they turn around, when it comes time for democracy.

As far as I am concerned, the hon. member who brought forward this amendment should be ashamed of himself. This is not the democracy for which Canadians are looking. I would like him to answer for this.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Saada:** Madam Speaker, that is interesting. I must not be a member of the team in question, because I did not receive any call from the Prime Minister this morning.

The second thing that is important, and I want to stress this point, is that the NDP member who just spoke said that only the intelligent people voted one way, which means that those who voted the opposite way are not intelligent.

Since when does a democracy disparage the intelligence of those who disagree? Since when does a democracy disparage the wish of member of the House of Commons to—

*Routine Proceedings*

[English]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** I rise on a point of order, Madam Speaker. I never said that the people on his side of the House were not intelligent. I said that all people in the House were intelligent and they should have the right to vote and not be forced by the Prime Minister.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Saada:** Madam Speaker, my colleague opposite has just repeated again that everyone should have the right to vote, and that is precisely what we want; that is precisely what we are doing right now.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Jacques Saada:** This House has the right to vote on a committee report, that is our job.

[English]

**Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, in my 30 years of being in and out of Parliament, I have never seen a flagrant abuse by a Prime Minister such as what happened this morning. It is outrageous. Because of that, I would move:

That the House proceed to orders of the day.

• (1035)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** All those in favour of the motion will please say ye.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** In my opinion the nays have it.

*And more than five members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** Call in the members.

• (1110)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 16)

YEAS

Members

Asselin  
Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls)  
Bergeron  
Bourgeois  
Brison

Bachand (Saint-Jean)  
Benoit  
Borotsik  
Brien  
Burton

Cadman  
Casey  
Clark  
Dalphond-Guiral  
Day  
Desrochers  
Duceppe  
Epp  
Forseth  
Gallant  
Girard-Bujold  
Gouk  
Grey  
Guimond  
Harris  
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)  
Jaffer  
Keddy (South Shore)  
Lalonde  
Lebel  
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)  
Mark  
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)  
Ménard  
Merrifield  
Moore  
Pallister  
Perron  
Plamondon  
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)  
Ritz  
Rocheleau  
Sauvageau  
Stinson  
Strahl  
Toews  
White (North Vancouver)  
Williams

Cardin  
Chatters  
Crête  
Davies  
Desjarlais  
Dubé  
Elley  
Fitzpatrick  
Gagnon (Québec)  
Gauthier  
Goldring  
Grewal  
Guay  
Harper  
Hearn  
Hinton  
Johnston  
Laframboise  
Lanctôt  
Lill  
Marceau  
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)  
McDonough  
Meredith  
Mills (Red Deer)  
Obhrai  
Parrish  
Picard (Drummond)  
Rajotte  
Reynolds  
Robinson  
Roy  
Schmidt  
Stoffer  
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)  
Vellacott  
White (Langley—Abbotsford)  
Yelich — 86

NAYS

Members

Adams  
Assadourian  
Bagnell  
Bélanger  
Bertrand  
Binet  
Brown  
Bulte  
Caccia  
Caplan  
Carroll  
Catterall  
Coderre  
Comuzzi  
Cuzner  
Dion  
Drouin  
Easter  
Eggleton  
Finlay  
Fontana  
Goodale  
Harb  
Harvey  
Jackson  
Jordan  
Keyes  
Knutson  
Lastewka  
Lee  
Macklin  
Malhi  
Marcil  
Matthews  
McCormick  
McKay (Scarborough East)  
Minna  
Murphy  
Nault  
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)  
Owen

Alcock  
Augustine  
Barnes (London West)  
Bennett  
Bevilacqua  
Boudria  
Bryden  
Byrne  
Calder  
Carignan  
Castonguay  
Cauchon  
Collenette  
Cullen  
DeVillers  
Discepola  
Duplain  
Efford  
Eyking  
Folco  
Frulla  
Grose  
Harvard  
Hubbard  
Jennings  
Karetak-Lindell  
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)  
Laliberte  
LeBlanc  
Lincoln  
Mahoney  
Maloney  
Marleau  
McCallum  
McGuire  
McLellan  
Mitchell  
Myers  
Neville  
O'Reilly  
Pagtakhan

*Routine Proceedings*

Paradis	Patry
Peterson	Phinney
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)	Pillitteri
Pratt	Proulx
Provenzano	Redman
Reed (Halton)	Regan
Robillard	Rock
Saada	Savoy
Scherrer	Scott
Shepherd	Simard
Speller	St-Julien
Stewart	Szabo
Telegdi	Thibault (West Nova)
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)	Tirabassi
Torsney	Ur
Valeri	Vanclief
Volpe	Wappel
Whelan	Wilfert

Wood— 119

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** I declare the motion lost.

We are continuing debate on the motion moved by the hon. member for Peterborough and the amendment moved by the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie.

**Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC):** Madam Speaker, we are debating the amendment that has been put forward by the member, the deputy whip of the Liberal Party. We are debating the amendment which obviously flowed from the concurrence motion that came forward from the chairman of the procedure and House affairs committee.

I want the members of the House to recognize that this is simply another expansion of the democratic deficit. What is happening right now is that we have a democratically voted motion that came forward from procedure and House affairs. It said unequivocally that one small little democratic reform was to be put into place in the House. One small democratic reform was nothing more than a secret ballot to elect the chairmen of the standing committees of the House. What a great idea. It came from the committee. It was put forward by the chairman today and now it is being amended to be sent back to the committee for 15 days. One has to ask the question: Why is the government so frightened? What is it so afraid of, to have this motion come forward in concurrence and have a vote in the House? Why must it be put back for 15 days?

I will tell members why. Because on November 7 when the House is under the Standing Orders of the House, the committees will be struck. The first item of business when the committees are struck will be an organizational meeting at which time the chairs and the vice-chairs will be elected. On November 7, which is before that 15 day time period, the Prime Minister's appointees will then be, by a show of hands, elected by those committees. Not only will they be elected by a show of hands, but they will be whipped into voting for that Prime Minister's appointee.

Do the members on that bench not realize that this is the opportunity to stand up and be noticed, not only by the House but by the citizens of this country, as having some backbone and certainly putting into place that democratic reform?

Then the Prime Minister will say that since all of the appointees have already been elected by the show of hands, there is no need for the procedure and House affairs committee to continue with this

motion, let us have it changed in the procedure and House affairs committee. How does the Prime Minister do that? By changing the members of the committee. What a wonderful strategy: to go back to the Prime Minister's Office and say "we have total control". That is what it is all about. It is about control, not about democracy.

Let us talk about some of the items that came forward in a speech just recently about democracy. There is a member of that very government who stood up not that long ago and suggested, number one, that there should be a secret ballot for committee chairs, but he went beyond that. He suggested that there should be change to private members' business as well, that private members' business should be more adapted not only to the members of the opposition, but also to the backbenches of the Liberals.

Private members' business should be taken seriously because, by the way, believe it or not, there are a lot of intelligent people in the House, not only on this side of the House, I will even give credit to that side of the House. A lot of those good ideas should be allowed to come forward, should be allowed to be put on the floor of the House and be voted on the merits of the bill, not on the fact that the Prime Minister's Office or a minister does not like what is coming forward outside of their office. That is what that individual stood and said. That is democracy. By the way, he probably took his blueprint from a white paper, a discussion paper, that we had put forward a number of months previously with respect to democratic reform. He also said that there should be an independent ethics counsellor. Hon. members should go figure. We have been saying that for a long time. That also speaks to democracy.

Today the strategy that is being implemented by the House does not allow any of this free thinking to go forward. I am absolutely frustrated and ashamed to stand in the House and say "Why is it that we cannot put our views forward to the Canadian public on a simple thing like electing a member to the chair?"

• (1115)

I want all Canadians to know right now that the 45 minutes during question period is not the important business of the House. That 45 minutes is simply theatrics. The important business of the House takes place in debate and particularly in debate at committee. I take great pleasure in being able to put forward my views at committee, and yes, even have my views accepted by members of the government because those views in fact do mean something and, yes, I do understand something of the committee that I sit on.

In the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs I would vote on a secret ballot for the current chair of that committee. I would vote for him in a secret ballot because he is the best person for the job. Because he takes his job to heart. Because he understands the portfolio. Because he really is an unbiased chair of that committee. I would vote for him in a secret ballot. I cannot say the same thing for other committees that I sit on, because those appointees do not have the same heart for the committee that other members on that side have.



*Routine Proceedings*

I strongly believe the person who has the ability should be the chair, not the person who is appointed by the Prime Minister's Office. Under this concurrence motion I would have the right to vote by secret ballot for the person I felt was the best person to be that chair. That person would also be a government member. There is nothing wrong with that. There is a majority, and I am prepared to accept that, yes, he or she could be a government member. I do not have any difficulty with this and the motion speaks to the person being a government member. It has to be a government member. The vice-chair has to be a government member. The second vice-chair can be a member of the opposition, as it is today.

I would like to have the opportunity to put the best person in the job. What is the argument to that? That there has to be regional parity and there has to be gender parity. I would much prefer to see the best person, than to try to change this function to put a person in place who does not have the ability. By the way, the gender parity and the regional parity will work itself out. The government has the right to appoint members to the committee. It can have that balance in committee members. It still has the majority. Why can it not allow the best person to do the job as the chairman?

By the way, the government really has not had a lot of success with parity. There are other ministers who are no longer ministers of the crown simply because they did not have the ability when they were placed in those jobs. There was a minister for CIDA, the solicitor general on a couple of occasions, also the minister for the status of women and multiculturalism. They were put into place because there was a requirement for gender parity, or for that matter regional parity, and it did not work. It does not work any better when they are appointed to the front benches as it does with the chairs of the committees.

The reason why there are many people here debating the issue is that it cuts to the heart of democracy. It cuts to the heart of what we are doing in the House. What it does is simply say "stand up and be heard". Not only does it say stand up, but it says make sure our voices mean something. It is a complete sham the way it is right now. I will tell hon. members why people do not come back to the House after a number of terms. Because they get frustrated at being what was mentioned by, I believe, the chair of the procedure and House affairs committee: I am not a eunuch. I have to say "thou protest too much". When a person starts telling people one is not, in most cases one probably is.

The problem is that we need to have impartiality in the chairs of those committees. We must have an individual who is prepared to take his or her agenda forward, not because the minister of the department tells them to but because it is the right thing to do for the standing committee. It could be the Standing Committee on Finance, the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food or the Standing Committee on Health. The chairman has to be the person to take that agenda forward, regardless of whether the minister wants it to happen or not because it is what is best for the House and best for Canadians.

The amendment we are dealing right now with is completely irrelevant. Let the Liberals, the government, vote on the concurrence motion. Let them vote on the issue of a secret ballot for committee chairs. That is all it is. We are not asking for anything else, just that one small step for democracy.

I am going to sit and listen to all of the rationalization and all the justification that comes out the mouths of the people on the other side. They had better make good arguments because Canadians are listening. If they do not tell us the real reason why and they are not going to allow this democratic reform to go forward, then they had better answer to Canadians.

• (1120)

**Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am accustomed to bluster and bombast around here but I must say that I find sanctimony rather suffocating.

The hon. member for Brandon—Souris is complaining about the amendment to the motion, which would send this matter back to committee. He somehow thinks that is wrong.

I do not know. Maybe he is arguing that the tyranny of the minority is the right thing to do. The committee is one small portion of the House. We have a larger body called the House of Commons. If the House passes the motion, the amendment to the motion simply says that this matter should go back to committee for further study. Is that somehow anti-democratic? Are we supposed to be held hostage by whatever opinion is brought forward by a standing committee of the House? Come on.

The hon. member raises another matter. He says that all they want to do is put their views forward publicly. What have we been hearing from the opposition members for the last several days? I would think their view has been expressed rather loudly, rather stridently and rather forcefully, and there is nothing wrong with that in a democracy. Please do not tell me that they have not been expressing themselves publicly.

He also says that, under this motion if it were to be passed, all he wants is for members to be allowed to stand up and be heard. Yet this member wants us to vote in secret. On the one hand he says to stand up and be counted, but please let me vote secretly. To me the two do not match.

We were sent here to be accountable. I cannot think of anything more accountable than standing up and voting so that people know exactly how we have voted. I would like to ask the hon. member for Brandon—Souris, if he wants to stand up and be heard, why would he ask to vote secretly so that no one would ever know for sure exactly how he votes?

• (1125)

**Mr. Rick Borotsik:** Madam Speaker, I will tell the member exactly why we have to have a secret ballot for the election of chairs of committees. The reason: because of the intimidation that flows from the Prime Minister's Office. That is exactly the reason why. When the PMO decides on the chosen one, and when those people on the government side do not put up their hands to vote for that chosen one, there are dramatic consequences. That is why it has to be a secret ballot. That is why it is the only way that the best individual can be chosen to chair a committee.

Again, I must repeat: The individual chosen will be a member of the government. We are not fighting for opposition here. We are fighting for democracy. Let us have the best person on that committee come forward and be put in the chair. That is why it has to be a secret ballot.

*Routine Proceedings*

Talk about bombast, Madam Speaker, I am incensed with the member who has just spoken. He now says that this is not a problem, and why would we not send it back to committee? I will tell the House why we should not send it back to committee. Because it was legitimately passed by that committee in the first place.

I ask the member: Why are they afraid to let their own members stand in this House and vote for this concurrence motion from the committee? That is the question that should be asked, not why it is that we are trying to fight for democracy and they are trying to stop it.

**Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the member for Brandon—Souris for that sincere speech.

The reality of the situation in the House is that there is a growing sense of frustration and it is not exclusively from the members on this side. There is a growing sense of frustration that the ability of all members to function for their constituents and in their constituents' best interests is threatened by the fact that power is excessively concentrated in the hands of the Prime Minister's Office.

This is just one example, but it is a glaring example. A number of members on that side have begun to echo the comments that have been increasingly made by members on this side, that such should not be the case.

However today we see an example of how much the power of the PMO has permeated the culture of the members opposite. We have members rising in their place today, or refusing to rise as the case may be, to express a view that they have expressed outside of the House that Parliament needs to be reformed, and power needs to be given back to the members of the House. The power that is excessively present in the Prime Ministers Office and concentrated there is a threat to our ability to represent our constituents effectively. This is well known and understood.

What the member for Brandon—Souris is expressing very eloquently is the frustration all of us increasingly feel here. He is also responding to the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, who has in his own constituency repeatedly talked about the need for members of Parliament to represent the views of their constituents. He has said that there should be more power in the hands of MPs. He now stands in his place and defends a practice that has lessened his own ability.

It is bad enough that we have members in this chamber who would give in to the will of the Prime Minister. I do not know out of what motivation, perhaps a desire for a promotion from a man who will not be in that office at some point in the near future. I am not sure. It is one thing to be afraid of the Prime Minister's Office, it is quite another for that member to stand in his place and contradict his previously held views. What the motivation is I am not sure. Perhaps it is a desire for the majority to continue to have power over a committee. I hope not because that is actually going to have a perverse outcome.

We have a man who is running for the leadership of the party opposite who has proclaimed almost exclusively and has tried to take ownership of his support for parliamentary reform. He has made it his mantra and has said repeatedly in the news media in the country

in the last number of weeks and months that he wants to see fundamental reform of this place.

It is not for me to comment on the presence or absence of a member, that I will not do. However I will say that if members were sincere in wanting to fight for parliamentary reform, if it were genuinely something they felt was important they would most certainly be here to publicly express their support for parliamentary reform. They would be here if they genuinely believed in that kind of reform, its necessity and urgency. They would not go out to the media and proclaim their support for such reform and then be absent in this place when they had a genuine opportunity to express in a real way their support for parliamentary reform.

This is just one example of the kinds of fundamental reforms that should take place here and must take place here so that we can genuinely speak for our constituents, so that we can demonstrate our support for their views in committee given the real opportunity we have there.

When members say things outside of the House that are not demonstrated by their behaviour within it then they demonstrate a fundamental weakness. The ability to be elected should not hinge on one playing to the current whims of the public. It should hinge on a sincere desire to fight for changes one believes in. When one does not believe in those changes one is absent from the House when one has the opportunity to express his or her position.

I know the member has served the people of Brandon—Souris in various capacities for a long time. I would like him to talk about his experience as the mayor of Brandon and how the mechanisms that we are espousing today were or were not followed in his administration of the city of Brandon.

● (1130)

**Mr. Rick Borotsik:** Madam Speaker, I will not take the whole minute because I know the member for Calgary Centre would also like a quick question. I will simply say that I would love to spend some time in the House and talk about how it is much better, more open and transparent in the municipal system than it is in this House.

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC):** Madam Speaker, we all know that democracy loses its strength gradually. It rarely occurs in a sudden fell swoop. Does the member for Brandon—Souris feel that one of the first indications of the development of a totalitarian regime is a fear of free votes and an insistence on secret votes?

**Mr. Rick Borotsik:** Madam Speaker, very quickly the answer to that is yes. I do not think that any free society should have 100% support for any kind of a model of government. That is exactly where we are heading in this particular regime where in fact all of these members will vote for something they really have no desire to do.

**Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion, which calls for secret votes in selecting chairmen of standing committees. We also have an amendment which, in effect, would send the motion back to the house affairs committee for 15 working days. I can say off the top that I support the amendment.

*Routine Proceedings*

Let me begin by making an observation about the motion itself. On the surface it appears very attractive. After all, the secret ballot is one of the most hallowed elements of our democratic system. Most people would agree with that. We use it when we select those who will represent us in the federal, provincial and municipal orders of government. We use it when we select leaders of our political parties, and frequently it is used in selecting officers for our professional, labour and voluntary sector organizations.

I guess one could ask: Why would we not extend this principle to members of the House of Commons? As the motion is written, with or without the amendment, we are faced with the possibility of what political theorists term the tyranny of the majority. Simply put, it means that whatever the majority wants becomes law. We should forget about minorities, they do not count.

In this context it could mean that we might end up with a system where all the committee chairs are from Ontario. I have nothing against Ontario or Ontarians. We have 101 Ontarians in our Liberal caucus and they are all great people. However there are some other criteria that we must take into account in this democratic systems of ours. I want to ask my friends across the way in the Alliance, the Conservative Party and in the Bloc, whether they would want to run the risk of facing the tyranny of the majority?

What of our current success in responding to the need to fully include women in important roles? Over the past many years that has become important. Might this go by the boards as well? What of the need to have chairs representing under-represented groups such as aboriginal Canadians and visible minorities? Do they not count when it comes to selecting chairs? Might this too be sacrificed by caving in to the tyranny of the majority? That is a worthwhile question to ask.

I believe that our committee chairs have, to a great extent—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh.

● (1135)

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** Order, please. The Chair is finding it very difficult to hear the hon. member. There will be an opportunity later to address the member during questions and comments. I would not like to repeat what I said earlier.

**Mr. John Harvard:** Madam Speaker, the system that we have used for now has come under attack. It is not a perfect system. It is false to argue that we are now wanting to continue on with the old system which maintains the prerogative of the Prime Minister's Office to name chairs. We are not fighting about that any more. We are fighting about how we elect chairs.

Let me talk about the old system for a moment. To some extent it has reflected the diversity of Canada reasonably well, at some times better than at others, but it has. For example, at the time the House recently prorogued, there were 12 chairs from Ontario, 2 from Quebec, 3 from Atlantic Canada and 3 from the west. Is that perfect? No, it is not perfect, but we could see that there was an attempt for some regional representation. Of the chairs, 16 were men and 4 were women. That is not a fair representation of gender, but at least we could see there was an attempt in that direction. I am not suggesting this is a perfect reflection, but there is some diversity.

By moving to a system of secret ballots to elect committee chairs, we could be putting all that at risk. What are the risks implicit in

reducing the transparency of our procedures in favour of greater secrecy? Once started, where does it lead us? It sounds a bit outrageous, but would we be hearing members of the opposition asking for secret ballots in the House? I do not think so.

I want to talk about the secret ballot because the opposition mixes two points that do not match. Yes, we do have the secret vote in general elections. Why do we have secret votes in general elections? Because at one time, early on in our democratic systems here in Canada and elsewhere, there was concern with an open system that there would be reprisals from the state, or if not from the state then from the powers that be.

It was agreed a long time ago that out of this fear of reprisal from the state that the electors would have the opportunity to cast their ballots in secret. It was the right way to go. All democrats believe in that. However, that principle does not hold when it comes to transacting public business at a standing committee. Electing a chair is public business and the public has a right to know how I vote.

The good constituents of Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia sent me here 14 years ago and they want to know how I vote. They want to know exactly how I transact and how I am involved in the public business. They do not want me voting secretly for chairs of standing committees. That is why I am opposed to the secret ballot when it comes to electing chairs.

The hon. member for Brandon—Souris talked about the open system and how it is flawed because there is intimidation from the Prime Minister's Office. Under the old system there might have been that consideration. There might have been that fear of some intimidation from the Prime Minister's Office. But we are not talking about the old system. We are talking about a new system that will be—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** Order, please. Perhaps some hon. members did not understand what I said in English, so I will repeat it. There will be an opportunity later if any members wish to address questions and comments to the member.

It is very difficult for the Chair to hear if an hon. member is using unparliamentary language.

I would ask hon. members to hold their questions and comments for later.

The hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia.

[*English*]

**Mr. John Harvard:** Madam Speaker, I think we can have a civil debate about this. After all, this is about democracy. I think we have listened to the opposition members and their concerns. We are not taking anything away from them in that regard.

It is important in this adversarial system, and what we have is an adversarial system, if we on this side feel that the opposition has put forward something that perhaps is not factual, we have a right and a responsibility to respond.

*Routine Proceedings*

We are not talking about the old system anymore. We are now talking about a new system of electing chairs. The question before the House really is how do we elect chairs? One way is by secret ballot and another way is openly. I support the open system.

I also want the various caucuses to choose their nominees for caucus chairs. I do not want the Prime Minister's Office to make that decision. I do not want the whip to make that choice. I do not want the House leader to make that choice. I want our caucus to make its nominations.

I would imagine when it comes to the Alliance that the caucus members would like to make their choices as opposed to their leader doing it. I am sure the same thing applies to the Bloc, to the Conservative Party and to the New Democratic Party.

Let us not get things mixed up. We are not talking about the old system any more. We are talking about a new system.

Let me again get to the question of referring this matter back to committee for only 15 sitting days. Is that a long time? We have had the old system since 1867. I suppose we could wait another 15 working days so that perhaps we could make some effort to make it right.

I submit that there are concerns and questions that will arise from this new system which we are going to embrace. We are going to embrace it but does the House not think that we should take some time, in this case 15 sitting days, to answer some of the questions and respond to some of the concerns that come out of electing committee chairs?

For example, I will tell the House, I will tell my constituents, I will tell all Canadians that I want within our own Liberal caucus some kind of very responsible nomination system. When we went to a standing committee meeting to elect a chair there would be one Liberal nominee. There would be one, not two, not three, not four. All Liberals within our own caucus would have some say in who would be a chair of a particular standing committee. I cannot think of a more democratic way.

There is another reason I want some time to think about this. I do not know whether the opposition caucuses do, but we do not have any system inside our caucus to consider representation from the regions.

I am from the west. I am a proud westerner. There are quite a few standing committee chairs. Under this new system I want the west to have some opportunity to have some of those committee chairs. To use the old jargon, all I want is our share. I would bet that my colleagues from Atlantic Canada want their share. Ontario does not have to worry as much. Ontario has a huge number of members. God bless them and I thank them for being here.

This is Canada after all. We are a diverse country. We are a country of many regions. We are a country of many different parts. Surely if we are going to make any effort to draw up the committees in a fair and just way, we have to take regional representation into account, gender into account and perhaps some other things into account as well.

**Mr. David Chatters:** The best person.

**Mr. John Harvard:** The best person, all right. I just heard a member from across the way talk about the best person. Of course that would be one of the criteria. Competence is very important.

● (1145)

The country has had federal governments since 1867. Since 1867 prime ministers have been making up their cabinets. One of the prime criteria for prime ministers is to take into account regional representation.

God forbid, if the day ever came that the opposition formed the government, I would bet that Saskatchewan Alliance MPs or Alberta MPs would want to be represented in cabinet. Does anyone think they would not want their provinces represented in cabinet? I do not think they would say, "Oh, no. We will just rely on competence. If it turns out that all of the competent members come from Quebec, that is fine. We do not care if we have a cabinet voice from Saskatchewan. We do not care if we have a voice from British Columbia".

Who are they trying to kid? Whose leg are they trying to pull? That is an absolutely cruel joke. It is a fact of life that in our political life regional representation is extremely important. I happen to think that if we are going to have the election of chairs, we have to take that into account.

It is not surprising that I come from a region that is not as densely populated as the province of Ontario or the province of Quebec. All I want is my share.

What I want is a little more time to study this matter. If we have waited 135 years, I suspect we could wait another 15 sitting days so that we have a couple of opportunities to get this right. Once we make this change, it will be made for a long time. Sure we can fine-tune it down the road. In fact, I would not mind this kind of approach being tested for perhaps a year or two. I want to make sure in the early days of this that we do our homework, that we address the questions and concerns that have to be addressed.

I support the amendment to the motion. Let us take a little more time and get this right.

● (1150)

**Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, I value my individual freedom. However, if I must surrender it in this society for the public good, I would much prefer being governed by the majority point of view than the tyranny of the minority. I want to make that clear.

Voting on bills is something totally different from the appointment of people to positions that require the trust of everyone in the House. We went through a procedure here where we voted for the Speaker of the House. Members did not worry about the gender of the person, what ethnic background the person had or what region of the country he or she was from. We voted collectively for what we thought was the best person for the job. Today I think we have a Speaker of the House who has the trust and the confidence of just about every member in the House. It is a real tribute to the secret ballot and the results of the secret ballot. I am absolutely amazed that a member of the House would look at secret ballots as some sort of dangerous concept.

*Routine Proceedings*

Would the member propose that we go back to having the Prime Minister appoint the Speaker of the House as a reform of Parliament?

**Mr. John Harvard:** Madam Speaker, the answer is no. I want the election of the Speaker. I supported that change, but if I had my way I would have one nominee for Speaker from my party because who has chosen the Speaker since we have elected Speakers in the last 10 to 15 years? It has been the opposition.

I have been around here for 14 years. There was more than one candidate for Speaker from the Liberal side in one election. I was in support of one of the minority candidates and he won. Why did he win? For reasons beyond my comprehension, the opposition decided to coalesce and they supported my minority candidate from the Liberal side. Naturally the other side would favour a secret ballot so that they could perhaps do a little bit of coalescing or whatever so that they could get their choice.

We have an adversarial political system and it works quite well. In the last election, Canadians decided they would vote for a majority Liberal government. That means there is a majority of Liberal members on this side. What they said was for us to follow our agenda and leave the opposition to the opposition. I support that system. I support that system also when it comes to the election of chairs.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—L'Érable, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am not at all surprised to hear the comments of the hon. member opposite. I do not know if it is a privilege to have had him as Chair but, on numerous occasions, he made heavy handed and rigid decisions. We could really see that this Chair was following orders coming directly from the Prime Minister's Office.

Today, his behaviour shows that he has once again been sent by the PMO to try to salvage what I now call the "downfall of the dictator" who has been in office since his re-election, in 2000.

The hon. member himself may be negotiating some chairmanship by continuing to follow the orders of the Prime Minister's Office to sabotage the committee's proceedings.

Is this what the hon. member calls democracy, is this is what he calls freedom of expression, and is this what he calls being a true parliamentarian in the House of Commons?

• (1155)

[*English*]

**Mr. John Harvard:** Madam Speaker, yes, I served as a committee chair for a number of years. I could put my hand on the Bible or any other document and assure the House that I never took an edict from the Prime Minister's Office. I suspect that the PMO thought that we were small fish in a very large pond and really did not care a heck of a lot about how I ruled at the committee meeting. I can assure the member that I never heard, saw or felt one edict from the Prime Minister's Office.

I remind the hon. member from Quebec, we are not talking about the old system any more. We are talking about a new system. I am saying to the Prime Minister and others, the old system is passé. We are now going to have an election of chairs and we as a caucus will decide who represents us as chairs on standing committees. Let us

not worry about prime ministerial edicts any more, even though they did not exist in the past. We are certainly not going to worry about them in the future because the old system will not apply.

**Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, through you to the speaker who just spoke, I want to say that first, a committee makes recommendations to the House so it is fitting and proper to have a debate and the final decision is that of the House. However I cannot support the idea of a secret ballot.

I have been here for nine years and I have never shirked a vote and I have never hidden from a vote. I think the precedent that would be set by having committee members have a secret ballot would be a deplorable one. We as MPs are expected by our constituents to stand up and be counted. I agree that the election for Speaker should be by open ballot. That procedure was brought in before I came to this House. However I cannot support, from my heart of hearts anytime, standing in this place and not being counted no matter what the party discipline or no matter what the consequences from the whip. I voted against the government about six times. It is precisely as it should be. The people should see when we vote against the government or when we vote on principle. We cannot see people voting on principle when it is a secret ballot.

I would like the member's observations on that. Does he not think that there will be a loss in public confidence if MPs were seen on committee to have to resort to the secret ballot for the simple election of a chairman?

**Mr. John Harvard:** Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague. I agree that we should have open votes when it comes to the Speaker. I think if we have secret ballots, as suggested by this motion, there will be an erosion of confidence.

In our recent caucus elections for chair, one particular candidate was told by a majority of people that they would vote for him. He expected to win. What happened? He lost. Somebody was telling some little white lies. They were saying one thing to his face and another thing when it came to the ballot box. I suspect that the same thing would happen when it came to the election of chairs. They would say to the public that yes, they voted for good old Joe from their region and that they support him, then they would vote for somebody else in the secret ballot.

We are public representatives and we should be voting publicly and openly. We should not have secret ballots.

• (1200)

**Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, that is the most bizarre defence of something so simple I have ever heard. He has contradicted himself about 12 times on this. He is raising all these questions and is virtually answering them himself.

He talks about standing in here and publicly announcing how he is voting. He said that if he voted in a secret ballot, his constituents would not know how he voted. He just said that he voted for the candidate for Speaker and that guy won. He has just told the public exactly how he voted for the Speaker. That is great, his guy won. Is there anything shameful for him to say he voted for X for Speaker and he won? No, he could do exactly the same thing for the committee chair.

*Routine Proceedings*

He also talked earlier about secret ballots and how to get elected on that day. That is just fine. In the good old days people were worried about reprisals from the state or the powers that be. That is exactly the answer as to why we should have secret ballot election, because they fear reprisal.

He just talked about the election of the caucus chair, saying that people would say they would support someone, probably like what people said to him during the election because they were trying to be polite to him, then they would have a secret ballot and do whatever they wanted. Then he said exactly the answer to this, that they feared reprisals from the state or “the powers that be”, which is lingo for the Prime Minister's Office.

He says that he will go ahead with this, when these people are feeling whipped and intimidated. It may not be the Prime Minister doing this because he will not waste his time on that. However he has put in place someone to do it. How does the member answer that?

**Mr. John Harvard:** Madam Speaker, let me say that the member for Edmonton North does not look at the full picture. If we are to have election of chairs, which I support by the way, then I want my caucus to pick one nominee. We can do that by secret ballot just in case some caucus chair or somebody else wants to intimidate me. However when I walk into a public place, like a committee meeting, I will vote openly and I will vote for my Liberal nominee just as I would expect the Alliance member to vote for her Alliance nominee.

**Mr. Jim Gouk (Kootenay—Boundary—Okanagan, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, I would like to end this session of the debate with a touch of honesty, which has been surprisingly missing. We are not talking about the election of chairs and how we elect them. We are talking about whether we elect chairs, which therefore is done by secret ballot, or whether the chair will be appointed by the PMO. That is what we are debating.

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** It is probably not the Chair's place, but I would caution the hon. member to imputing motives to members in the House. I will permit the answer to a comment or a question.

**Mr. John Harvard:** Madam Speaker, we are not talking about a system that gives the prerogative to the Prime Minister to select chairs. That system is passé. We are moving to a system of electing chairs by caucus members. Therefore the question is this. How do we arrive at our caucus expression? That is the question before the House.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue, BQ):** Madam Speaker, there is a lot of interest in the issue being debated. I am not surprised to see how government members are trying to defend a system that has served them well until now by controlling just about all the proceedings of this House.

The Prime Minister's Office not only appoints ministers, but also controls Liberal members during the proceedings of this House and even of the committees. This means that the exercise taken part in by voters, which consists in choosing democratic representatives, loses some of its meaning, since the powers are concentrated in the hands of a single individual, namely the Prime Minister, since he has the

authority to choose, alone, just about all the holders of senior positions.

What we have seen in practice—I have been here since 1993—and the way things have worked until now, is that committee Chairs report directly to, or are chosen directly by, the Prime Minister. This cannot be obscured by the arguments we are hearing today. I will return to this point in greater detail later on. Everyone who wishes to maintain the present system, however, makes no bones about saying “Yes, but there are criteria that have to be taken into consideration, such as regional representation; committee Chairs have to come from different regions, and so on.” This is a confirmation that indeed someone, somewhere, is carrying out the exercise of examining people against these criteria when it comes time to choose committee Chairs, whereas the Standing Orders stipulate that committee Chairs are to be elected by committee members. But here they are telling us, quite openly and unashamedly, “No, there have to be criteria to ensure a balance between the various regions of the country as far as representation is concerned”.

This is an out and out admission of what is being done, which is that someone, in this case someone in the PMO—although he can delegate this to the party whip, the leader in the House, or someone else—is the one to choose the person who will hold that position. Then the MPs are told “Be obedient, vote this way, or else”.

That is why the idea has come up that we now have before us, about selecting those who will chair the committees of this House, of which there are several by allowing parliamentarians who are on the committee to themselves choose the person who will head the committee, and to do so by secret ballot. This is specifically in order to decrease the possibility of reprisals.

I hear the Liberals' argument, the same one they used when this was debated in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. “Yes, but the public has a right to know”. There is nothing stopping a member from announcing publicly whom he has supported, but this can also preserve the ability of individuals to make choices without having to face the negative consequences inherent in so doing.

I do not think that the voters in my riding have expectations when it comes to the candidate that I would support as Chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I do not think that people would necessarily ask me this question if I told them that members selected the Chair by secret ballot. Obviously, the criterion that should influence our decision is competence. We will select the most competent person.

The opposition parties acted in such good faith on this issue that they even accepted an amendment proposed by the member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for Mississauga Centre, stipulating that committees would continue to be chaired by members of the government party. At the very least, we would have liked to discuss the fact that, with two exceptions, committees are always chaired by Liberal members. We could have argued that point. I am not saying that things are perfect elsewhere but, in other places, this is not how they operate. At the National Assembly almost half of the committees are chaired by opposition MNAs. This does not prevent the committees from doing their work.

*Routine Proceedings*

While we are on this, there seems to be total confusion regarding the role of committee chairs. Liberal members who are not ministers or Parliamentary secretaries think that if they chair a committee, they will be a part of the government or the executive. This is not their role. It is ministers who are included in the executive branch. The role of House committees is to study matters, to delve into them, to study bills after second reading and to report to the House. Committees are accountable to the House, and not only to the cabinet.

Committees are there for us. We work for all of our colleagues. People cannot sit on every committee. That is why there is a limited number of representatives on each committee. They must do their work and be as neutral as possible.

If we want there to be a balance of powers, the committees must be able to say to the government, "No, this is the wrong direction and there should be amendments to this particular bill".

• (1205)

When the individuals who chair these committees are appointed by the Prime Minister, it seems obvious to me that a large part of this exercise becomes meaningless, because the outcome is known in advance. The argument used by government members is that "Voters gave us a mandate to govern".

That is absolutely true, but it does not mean that they gave them a mandate to do whatever they want. This is why opposition parties exist. This is why, following a general election, the government is part of an institution that includes members who represent various political views and who were elected by voters. We are elected as democratically as government members are.

The public expects us to play a role, to have a say. It also expects those hon. members who are not ministers to have a say in the parliamentary debates, to have real power and influence.

No one from the other side can convince me that they truly believe that hon. members, particularly government members, have enough power in this House regarding all the tasks that they must fulfill.

There is a huge gap between what the public expects in terms of the role of an elected member of Parliament, and the actual role or influence that we have here.

The democratic deficit is such that one of the candidates to the position of Prime Minister is going around saying that one of his priorities is to correct the democratic deficit. So, he agrees that there is indeed a democratic deficit. However, will it be only Liberal members who will make the changes that are required, and will these changes only be made when they are prepared to consider them?

There is a proposal before us. It is not an earth shattering reform; it is about electing committee chairs through a secret ballot. The Liberals are in a frenzy; they are holding special caucuses; they are divided on the issue. There is some arm twisting going on to ensure that this report will not be adopted. We also have before us a stalling tactic, that is a proposal to postpone by 15 days the adoption of this report and to ask the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to review the matter.

I have been here a number of years and we have had these debates in the past. It is not the first time that this issue has been raised, and I am not sure that Liberal members really want to examine it. On the contrary, I think they want to sway the few Liberal members who would like to support opposition members in their efforts to change the current way of doing things.

As a matter of clarification, let us be clear, the amendment before us, the Liberal amendment, has a very obvious strategic objective. It is asking that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs consider the matter for another 15 sitting days before reporting to the House.

As it happens, by then, the deadline for setting up committees will have passed. By some strange coincidence, by the time the matter is brought again before the House, all committee chairs will have been elected.

It is pretty obvious, as difficult to miss as an elephant, that the government's strategy is to avoid the issue, put the committees in place and select the chairs. We will reconsider the issue in 15 days, but it will no longer matter. It is an issue right now because the committees have to be struck.

I might add that opposition members have been extremely cooperative with the government side. I repeat, we acted in good faith. We have agreed to let three committees start working. Committees are already sitting because it was recognized that urgent matters needed to be considered.

I am thinking in particular of the Standing Committee on Finance, which is conducting pre-budget consultations, although it is open for debate what influence, if any, the participants may have. The fact remains that we agreed to let that committee sit.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs is also sitting. There is no need for lengthy explanations as to why; in the current context of international instability, we want the members of the committee to be able to consider, as they are doing this morning, issues as important as that of Iraq.

Also, the Special Committee on the Non-Medical Use of Drugs, established by the House of Commons, is currently sitting.

We have shown good faith. We have allowed a number of committees to start their work. The funny thing is that, in the media, I have read and heard the government House leader complain that the opposition was preventing committees from sitting and doing their work.

• (1210)

For the benefit of those listening to us, we have no legislative agenda before us, or none to speak of. Even if all the committees were struck right now, there is virtually nothing before the House, to such an extent that, for the first time, last Monday—and I have been a member of this House since 1993—if we had not had a take note debate, there would have been nothing in government orders for discussion in this Parliament. That is a pretty big deal. There are major problems over there. I realize they are in a leadership crisis and there is a leadership race going on, but they are having trouble functioning with any effectiveness.

*Routine Proceedings*

In the background of it all, of course, those issues are part of the current debate, but the institution must take precedence over any partisan or non-partisan issues or any questions regarding the personal interests of the next leader or the future of individual members.

What is being proposed is a change, which will mean that, regardless of which party is in power, members of the House will be free to elect committee chairs on an independent basis without any fear of reprisal.

What, practically speaking, will this change, as far as the general public is concerned? Someone might say "Yes, I am listening to you, and it is all very interesting, but what is that really going to change for the rest of us?" That is a very legitimate question.

The public wants to see Parliament doing more debating of the priorities that concern them, they want to see Parliament having to deal with real and effective pressure. It is true that we have some powerful tools, such as oral question period and the committees, where we manage to get a certain number of things accomplished, but never as much as we could if the committees were far more independent, if they could do their real job, and if they were able to set their own agenda.

I do not mean to suggest that some of them do not do so, but there are not enough of them, and those who do are not given enough freedom. It is not right that members are pressured in this way. There will always be ways to influence people and ways to make them act in one way or another.

However, when members who chair committees become accountable to their colleagues around the table, they will endeavour to work as effectively as possible for all of their colleagues, rather than simply working to satisfy the Prime Minister or the minister who got them the chairmanship of their committee.

This takes nothing away from the government's ability to make the choices it wants, subsequently. However, there will be credible public voices in Parliament that will have a say, committee reports will be more critical of government decisions and government members will be able to be heard more freely. All of this will give elected members more clout. At the end of the day, the government and the House will decide, but at least we will have a more credible and effective forum than we have right now.

Committee work may not be the part of our work that is the most closely followed, or the most glamorous, but it is nonetheless one of the areas where we spend the most time and energy.

Personally, I would like for this work to have more of an impact, out of respect for all those who spend so many hours defending their constituents and promoting the issues and concerns that affect them. Stronger, more accountable and more independent committees will improve the whole institution.

What we are proposing is a small step in this direction. As I already mentioned, we are not talking about a revolution, but a beginning. This will help improve the effectiveness of committees.

Other measures also need to be taken, but we cannot wait for large-scale general reforms that will never occur. A member of the Canadian Alliance made this proposal in committee. The proposal

was studied and the report was passed by a majority of the members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the courage shown by the hon. member for Mississauga Centre, who voted against her Liberal colleagues. She did so primarily as a matter of principle. She made it very clear that she did not do it to please the opposition. Her attachment to her political party is very strong and I do not question it. This is a woman who has fought for her principles, for things in which she believes. She did it first and foremost for these reasons. I am convinced that she is the object of all kinds of pressures, which does not make it easy for her. This is why I think she was very courageous to do what she did.

I wanted to mention this, because if more people were to follow her example, we would all benefit. Sure, we have our political disputes and we have diverging views on many issues. But, beyond this, I think that the hon. member deserves to be commended for her courage.

When we dispose of the matter, when we vote, regardless of whether that vote takes place today or in the coming days, when we deal with the amendment brought forward by the government, which is trying to prevent debate, I hope that this amendment will be rejected and that we will deal with the substantive issue of whether or not committee chairs should be elected through a secret ballot.

• (1215)

We will see if others show the same courage. It is easy to claim left and right to want to reform institutions and make parliamentary business work better. However, we have a tangible example here. We will see where Liberal members really stand in this debate. I hope that others will take this opportunity to support one of their own. I am sure that many Liberal members think the same thing. I hope they will voice their support. The more of them that speak up, the less they will have to fear reprisals.

Then again, many things about a number of other aspects of our system would need to be reviewed to ensure that intimidation is not the only way to ensure efficiency. Allow me to repeat the line that irked me the most among those used by Liberal members in committee. This proposal did not come out of thin air. Here is what I heard: "We are in government. We can do whatever we want". This basically sums up what I heard.

How arrogant to think they can do anything they want. Our political system provides for some balance to try to divide power to some extent to ensure that all the power is not in the hands of a single individual. This is why we do not have a dictatorship. We have a democratic system so that we can see the forces at play. There is a role for the opposition to play, and one for government members who do not want to be heard only within their caucus.



*Routine Proceedings*

I can see that they would make the necessary efforts within their caucus to influence positions taken by their party, but they also have a role to play and a responsibility to take within this institution. They must be able to do this freely. A potential appointment as committee chair, parliamentary secretary or whatever, under the current reward system, must not be the sole motivation. Substantive issues must be what people are concerned about in making a decision.

I sincerely hope that they will seize this opportunity now before us to take real action when it comes to change. I know that on this side of the House, with perhaps the exception of a few benches near the Speaker that are occupied by government members, members will vote against the amendment moved by the government to refer the report back to committee. In practical terms, referring the report back to committee amounts to not resolving the problem now, but putting it off until later, and if possible, forever.

Those who have followed this debate closely in recent days have seen how much energy the Prime Minister, the House leader and the whip have devoted to ensuring that this measure does not go through. This shows how much they want to hold on to control of everything that goes on here.

Again, we are not talking about establishing a mechanism that would disrupt the functioning of the government. We are talking about giving members more freedom, more autonomy. I have trouble understanding how anyone could oppose this. Those who would rather vote by show of hands are free to state publicly how they voted. However, we should allow those who prefer to cast their ballot in secret the opportunity to do so.

I will conclude by saying that there is a fine example of this in the House, with the election of the Speaker of the House. Like the chairs of the committees, which are an extension of the proceedings of the House, the Speaker of the House needs greater flexibility in order to be able to represent all the members properly. The position of Speaker of the House of Commons is an elective position, and the Speaker is elected by the members. This has positive results, in that we have greater confidence in the integrity of the position and the person occupying it since we are involved in the process. It is not true that he is elected by the opposition; we do not all vote the same way. In the most recent elections, some of our members voted for one candidate, while others voted for another. It was democratically decided however, with Liberal members voting for one or the other. We have confidence in the position because it is an elective one.

In closing, I hope that more members will show the same courage as the hon. member for Mississauga Centre and add their voices to those of opposition members to ensure that a step is taken toward making Parliament, and democracy within this institution, work better.

● (1220)

[*English*]

**Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree that election of committee chairs is probably a positive thing. I do believe it has to be done openly, but what concerns me is this prospect of electing chairmen by secret ballot.

To me it is an ethical issue. I think that Canadians expect of their members of Parliament to always be seen to make their decisions on behalf of the people who elected them in an open fashion. I have long deplored the practice in the House whereby MPs who feel they cannot support their party hide behind the curtains or abstain or do not enter the chamber to vote.

I am happy to say that there has been a very positive evolution on this side over the years that I have been here. Fewer and fewer MPs do that on this side, and more and more when they feel, by their conscience, that they cannot support the government's or the party's position they will stand up and be seen to be voting against the government. I apply that to the House in general.

I believe, passionately indeed, that the people who elect us are entitled to see us publicly take our positions, whether they are for the government or whether they are against the government. I submit that if we have a secret ballot at committee that is an invitation for Canadians to lose confidence in the members of that committee because it will be interpreted that they are afraid to stand up for their principles when they vote at committee. That would apply not only to government MPs but also to opposition MPs.

It is fundamental. I think what we are dealing with here is an issue that could erode Parliament in a very significant and dramatic way. I add that I am opposed to the secret ballot for the election of the Speaker as well, but that was something that was introduced before I came to the House. I think it should be changed. While I think that we can reform the system, in the end I think it is our absolute fundamental duty in everything we do as members of Parliament to do it openly and to be seen by Canadians to be taking our positions one way or another.

I ask the member opposite, when he finds himself in a position of not agreeing with his party during a vote in the House of Commons, does he hide behind the curtain or does he come into the chamber, take his place and be seen to vote against his party? Similarly, does he need a secret ballot at the committee level in order to feel free to express his opinion, which may actually be against his party? Does he need a secret ballot to express himself at committee? Does he need to hide behind the curtains in order to express himself if he does not agree with his party in this House?

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Brien:** Mr. Speaker, I will begin by answering the last question. It is clear to me that, if members can vote by secret ballot, they will have more latitude to make the choices they feel are best.

The hon. member is very well aware that, in practice, the way things work is that members have to support the candidate hand-picked by the PMO. Consequently, it is not true that the choice is a free one when voting is held in committee. He knows that very well. I cannot believe he does not. It is possible in theory at this time for a member to vote freely for a chair, but in practice that is not the way it happens. We know very well that everyone can be identified and so they will have to live with the pressure that goes along with that, afterward.

*Routine Proceedings*

I want to be clear, so I will take a typical committee as an example. It normally has sixteen members: nine from government, three from the official opposition, two from the Bloc Québécois, one from the NDP and one from the Conservatives. So nine of the sixteen are Liberals. One of these is for the chair, which leaves eight Liberal members, and seven all together for the opposition. We are not talking about destabilizing the government in the formation of committees. If the Liberals remain united on the policies their party defends in committee proceedings, they are still in the majority. These proportions reflect the results at the polls.

There is no major change except that the person who will head the committee will do so with increased dependence on the committee members, not on someone from outside the committee who has chosen him. This will have an impact on the agenda, on the way the work is carried out, on the way the committees can express their opinions on government policies.

It is obvious to me that this is a positive step. It is the hon. member's prerogative to wish that we continue to vote by a show of hands, even to elect the Speaker of the House, or that we vote by rising one after the other. At least, the hon. member is consistent. Most of his colleagues are saying, "No, it is somewhat different for the position of Speaker of the House". The hon. member is showing a degree of consistency. He does not want the Speaker of the House to be elected through a secret ballot.

The hon. member fears that a secret ballot—that is what he claims, but I cannot believe that he thinks that—will result in a loss of voters' confidence. I do not agree. Confidence is already eroding, and this goes for all parties, because voters feel that we do not have enough impact and influence on the government, that we must all follow party lines, with the result that we cannot represent their interests. The proposal before us would ensure greater independence for everyone, including opposition members, when the time would come to choose committee chairs.

It is not true that the seven members from four different parties are always going to choose the same person. Pending further study of the matter, we agreed to still have Liberals for chair, but it would not be the end of the world if more committees were chaired by opposition MPs. This does not prevent government members, being the majority, from still maintaining a certain consistency with their election commitments, if they feel a committee is headed in a direction that is not desirable for the public and not in keeping with their commitments. There will always be that freedom, but there would be someone in charge with greater independence.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts does not have a Liberal as chair. I have not heard from them that it works any less well than the others, despite not having someone from the governing party in power. Are some of the hon. members questioning that approach as well, saying that it should not be done that way? We feel there should be more committees and that overall they should be less partisan. That should be the next step: make them more independent and less partisan.

The first step, as proposed today, is to ensure that the person who chairs a committee is chosen by the membership and that the selection is by secret ballot.

● (1230)

What is there here that does not make sense? What is there in it that is so harmful? Everything will continue to operate, but many of the MPs on the committees will be able to take part. The ones who spend the most time in committee are not the ministers. The ones who are so fiercely opposed to the measure proposed today are not the ones who are generally in attendance.

I am sure that, if the vote involved only members who are on a committee, the outcome would be different than if the ministers or the Prime Minister voted, because the latter is going to twist a lot of arms to keep the change from happening. To those who really work on committees, this is a step in the right direction if the way the institution works is to be improved.

Once that has been done, we will start working on the next step.

[English]

**Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan (York North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am rising in debate today to support the idea of a secret ballot for the election of chairs and vice-chairs in our committees. I think that if we were able to go forward with this initiative it would be an important milestone in furthering the democratization of Parliament.

I have listened to the debate, and earlier I heard a member say something about the work of committees. I suggest to those people watching that committees are only a small part of what we do in the House. People who do watch us here in the House may be puzzled as to what it is that members of Parliament actually do, particularly backbenchers and members of the opposition. I have to say that contrary to what was said earlier, committees are not a small part of what we do. They are a very significant part of what we do.

As a backbencher one has limited options at times, but some of the good work we can do is fully represented in our committee work. For a backbencher there are opportunities around private members' business and private members' legislation forward, and certainly we have the opportunity to debate, speak and ask questions in the House. We also have the right to stand in the House and vote as our conscience dictates, but probably some of the most important work we do for Canadians is the work that is done in committee.

I am the vice-chair of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. Over a number of years I have had the pleasure of working with Liberal colleagues as well as members of the opposition. Together we have worked in a very positive way to bring forward studies and other things that have meaning and relevance to the lives of Canadians. However, I am deeply concerned that we would not be able to have a positive outcome of this initiative around a secret ballot for the voting procedures for chairs and vice-chairs.

I have listened to some arguments about the notion of whether a secret ballot should not be part of the democratic process, that people send us to Ottawa so that they know exactly where we stand on certain issues. Quite clearly, I am making my position very clear in the House today as to where I stand on the issue of secret ballots. We also have the opportunity to follow the committee Hansard and see where individuals stand on particular issues.

*Routine Proceedings*

It is really important to note that when we look at the application of the open vote process and what that really means, there is a great deal of pressure put on certain members, particularly government members, to vote in a certain way. As a member who has taken stands differing from the government's on a variety of occasions, both in the House and in committee, I have to say that it is a very lonely position at times, when one is doing clause by clause work on legislation, when every day that the committee meets one has to speak against and vote against the government's position. Sometimes there may be one Liberal colleague who supports one's point of view, and sometimes there may be two, but oftentimes one is in a very lonely position, because although other members certainly have the right to make decisions as to how they vote a lot of pressure is put on members to vote according to what the government has in mind on a particular item.

So when we take a look at the real application of what happens with the open ballot versus the secret ballot, it does not encourage a healthy democratic process. There are individuals around the globe who have fought fiercely to have the right for a secret ballot so that they can protect themselves and vote their wishes. Indeed, it has been mentioned that we vote for our Speaker through secret ballot. I might add that we vote for caucus chairs by secret ballot as well. I think there are very good reasons why it is necessary that secret ballots must be used in certain situations, particularly in this situation.

● (1235)

I would be happy if parliamentary standing committees could openly choose chairs and vice-chairs but that is not the current state. We must take a look at the secret ballot as a transition stage, a first step to encouraging a healthier democratic process within Parliament.

I also have something I wanted to raise in the House. The last time the chair and the vice-chair of the parliamentary Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development was chosen was by secret ballot. Indeed there was unanimous consent by the parliamentary standing committee because the committee itself recognized that this was an important initiative. It was an important way to practice parliamentary democracy. As a result, our chair, the hon. member for Davenport, was chosen through secret ballot and I, the vice-chair on the government side, was chosen by secret ballot and the opposition vice-chair was chosen by secret ballot. What happened? Did the committee work stop? Did we fall into chaos? No, we resumed our work.

It is important for people who are watching to know, because they may not have the opportunity to see how parliamentarians work in committee on a regular basis, that it enhanced our ability and our working relationship in committee. We may get up in the House and from time to time disagree on issues, perhaps in a partisan way. People watching question period can see how partisan members can be in question period and how they can attack each other on the issues.

However I must say that work that is done in committee, particularly the environment committee, when we are working with the opposition, is done in a non partisan way. It is a healthy relationship except of course when one is a government member

disagreeing with the government's position, which of course is another issue.

I would like to add that when I first rose in this place to give my maiden speech I talked about Parliament as an evolving place, that it is dynamic. It is a living institution. The other point that I made was that as members of Parliament we merely pass through this place. When we look at the history of parliament compared to our tenure, and whether our tenure is only for a short two-year or four-year term or whether it is a 40 year commitment to public life, it is so insignificant. We merely pass through this place.

When we pass through this place it is incumbent on us to understand that times change and that the institution of Parliament must change as well. We, representing our constituents and the people of Canada, have a responsibility to participate and to encourage that change. It is not just the opposition and some of us on the government side that feel there is a time for change, but certainly the public also feels it.

On this particular issue the public has recognized that there is a time for change and there is a time to further enhance the democratization of Parliament. One of the best ways we can do this, one of first steps we can take on this evolving road to further enhancing the democratic state of Parliament is the election of chairs and vice-chairs by secret ballot. I encourage all members to support this initiative.

● (1240)

**Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, it is great to hear a Liberal member rise and talk about improving the democracy of committees because it is so unusual. Parliament is not the government. Parliament is where the government comes to get permission to tax and spend the people's money and have its legislation passed. However there is this long tradition of the independence of Parliament itself and I was pleased to hear the member talk about that.

Perhaps she could tell the House the precedent that was set at environment committee where indeed the chair of that committee that she sits on was elected by secret ballot and the skies did not part and we did not have an earthquake. We were demonstrating that committees can be independent and we can elect our officers by secret ballot. It did happen in our committee. Maybe she could talk about that experience.

**Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for those comments. Indeed the member opposite has been a member of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. He was also the vice-chair on a subcommittee of the parliamentary standing committee which organized an important forum that took place on Parliament Hill back in 1996, where we looked at the issue of jobs, the environment and sustainable development. I must thank the member for his contributions in the past. He has shown a significant interest in the environment, which I must applaud.

*Routine Proceedings*

The member opposite has asked me to explain to the House what happened. It was simple. We sat in committee and the question was put: Can we have a secret ballot for chairs and vice-chairs? Everybody said, "Sure, why not?" Then there was a secret ballot. A chair was nominated, vice-chairs were nominated, and members of the committee voted in a secret ballot.

I will not talk about my credentials or my position on the committee. However, I would like to talk about the chair of the environment and sustainable development committee. The hon. member for Davenport was a former minister of the environment. He is a long standing member of the House. He is a longstanding member of the environment and sustainable development committee. There is probably no other member of the House that knows more about the environment, environmental issues, environmental policy and planning in terms of how Environment Canada operates and all of the other departments of government with regard to environmental issues. He was the one that was selected by the members of that committee. Therefore, I would suggest that there are times that members of Parliament, if given the opportunity, can exercise wisdom in their vote.

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague, with whom I had the pleasure, incidentally, of sitting on the environment committee for some time. She is right when she says that this committee worked very democratically.

I would simply like her opinion. Does she not believe that when a chair is elected by secret ballot by the members, this chair has more respect, more power and more credibility with members of the committee?

[*English*]

**Mrs. Karen Kraft Sloan:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member opposite as well. She and I have had many an opportunity to have good discussions over dinner as we travelled the country doing the CEPA review. I appreciate her significant contribution to the environment committee as well. It is interesting to note that when members have an opportunity to sit on the environment committee they learn an awful lot. They retain their interest in the environment as well. Members should have a mandatory time period where they serve time on the environment committee.

It is true that we work very hard and very well together. There are a variety of reasons as to why people make a decision. Sometimes it may not be for the best reasons. However, in the majority of instances parliamentarians will make good decisions. Indeed they have made good decisions in this particular instance with the election of our chair from the previous round.

I would suggest that because parliamentary standing committees work two, three or four times a week on issues that Canadians care about we must have good working relationships. It is easy to get into an antagonistic or a partisan fight in committee. It is easy to throw those words out. It is more difficult for us to bite our tongues and it is more difficult sometimes to listen. We learn an awful lot when we listen.

I must tell the House that as vice-chair I felt better because I was elected by a secret ballot. I knew that people on the committee were willing to put their trust in me as the vice-chair. I cannot speak for the chair himself, but I am sure that he feels the same way. I have other colleagues who are chairs of committees who would prefer a secret ballot. I cannot give names because I cannot speak for them. In many respects a chair would feel better about a secret ballot situation, and the committee would work together more effectively as well.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to join in this important discussion today. It is apparent from the number of members who have been here throughout the day, and the emotion and passion that people have been speaking with, that members hold this issue close to their heart. There has been a real effort among parliamentarians from all parties to ensure that we reform our parliamentary system. It has been recognized that the parliamentary system has become less democratic.

I am pleased to be part of the debate and that there has been so much effort placed by all the different parties to be here today. I want to express my thanks to all the members of the procedure and House affairs committee. I do not think there is any question that they took this on and it was not going to be an easy discussion. It was not going to be an easy topic to deal with. However they did it and stayed committed to that, and I mean all the members of the committee. I commend them all, each and every one.

I want to reflect upon a number of different comments that have been made this morning. From the New Democratic Party's perspective we heard from my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst who was appalled at the meandering that was taking place to stop the democratic process. He was very active on the procedure and House affairs committee.

However I want to comment on some of the other things that were mentioned this morning. The member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia made a number of comments. I listened to them in depth. It was interesting to note that he started off by saying that he was tired of listening to the flustering and blustering that everyone was going on about in the House. I want to make special note of that. I do not think there is flustering and blustering going on. It is honest concern for the democratic process.

It was interesting to note that his comments followed in line with the member for Ottawa West—Nepean, the government's chief whip. She made the comments that electing chairs was bad because it could undermine the government's confidence in the chairs and right to govern; it would turn the elections into popularity contests; and it would make it harder for the government to ensure gender and regional balance among the committee heads.

*Routine Proceedings*

My colleague from Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia went on and on about the need for gender parity and regional representation, and how it was important that we not lose that if committee chairs were elected. Has anyone done the numbers? Certainly the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia has not done the numbers. Let us count the number of chairs that are gender balanced so that we have fairness. Unless there are 34 committees we do not have gender balance because 17 of those chairs are men, 17 out of 22 committees.

Let us talk about the regional balance between the vice-chairs and chairs. Twelve are from Ontario. If that is the government's idea of balance it is no wonder we are in trouble. We must do something about the way the chairs are elected and what is happening in this Parliament.

In all the flustering and blustering that the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia mentioned, what he needed to do was to get down to the basic facts. Numerous parliamentarians have been seeing time and time again that with the government there is no democracy. The Liberals always stand up and applaud when we say the Prime Minister has been in government for nine years. They applaud the fact that the Prime Minister has been there for nine years and we cannot even have gender parity in committees. They applaud the fact that democracy within Parliament has digressed further and further each and every year that the Prime Minister has been here. We have come to a point now, and again to reflect what the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia said, that the reason we ended up having secret ballots was because people feared if they voted a certain way they would be attacked in some way, shape or form.

● (1250)

Those were not his exact words. However, that is why we are in the situation today where members are calling for secret ballots. People fear there will be repercussions against them in some manner, whether that be in the process of their not being able to be part of a committee that they care passionately about, like the member for Davenport, or in some other way. There is a problem here.

To those of us in the House who can stand and vote the way we want and take whatever comes at us without a secret ballot, that is great. Ideally that is the best approach. However, we have reached the point in the Parliament of Canada where members are saying, "We do not feel we can do that any more. We do not feel we are getting the best people to represent the people of Canada, to get the issues out there. We do not feel that it is working". It is not just the opposition members who are saying that; it is members on the government side, and they are being hammered down.

I say to my colleague from Manitoba, the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, if he truly believes that the government and the Prime Minister have acted fairly to all Canadians and to members in this House, then go ahead and keep talking like that, but quite frankly, people will see it for what it is. It is someone trying to find his place so that everything will be just hunky-dory for that person. With all due respect to my male colleagues, if one were a male from Ontario, one would be sitting pretty, but apart from that, there is a problem.

Yesterday in the House we honoured a public servant who had committed 50 years of his life to the public service. Numerous times throughout the day I heard comments, including from the individual himself, that he was here to make sure things worked for members of Parliament, to make sure it was fair for members of Parliament. I think all members in the House, because I have yet to hear anyone say differently, truly respects that individual because they know he was fair to each and every member of Parliament. They know that what he was doing was to make things better for parliamentarians, knowing that they were working to make things better for Canadians. We honoured that man and we greatly respected him because he did what he set out to do. He did what he intended to do. He made it happen.

Just talking for the sake of talking about democracy and fairness is not worth anything. People can talk and talk, as the Prime Minister has done, but if they do not truly put in place democratic processes or take those actions themselves, after a while people will not believe them. That is where we are. Nobody believes that the Prime Minister is acting democratically.

Quite frankly, there are a good number of us who do not for one second believe that the Prime Minister in waiting who everyone thinks is out there is any different. People have to practise what they preach. They have to put those actions into practice. They have to vote accordingly. If they do not do that, then they just do not care and they do not deserve the respect of the Canadian public or parliamentarians, the respect that was given to a 50-year public servant, respect which the Prime Minister will never have, no matter how long he sticks around because of whatever reason, no matter how much of a legacy he wants to present to Canadians prior to his leaving.

● (1255)

There will be no respect because under his direction we have seen less and less democracy in Parliament. We have seen less and less fairness in our country. We have seen regional splits. We have seen a disunifying of the whole nation under his watch because he has played one region against the other. He has played one member of his own caucus against the other. He has not acted in the best interests of Canadians. We deserve better. We deserve better in this Parliament and Canadians deserve better.

I am happy to see here today that the opposition parties have united in saying that something has to change. If we are to give the best representation we can to Canadians, something has to change.

To those who will try again today to suggest that we cannot have elected chairs because the Prime Minister could not ensure that we had gender balance or regional fairness, take a look at the facts. Do not try for one second to pretend that there has been fairness or democracy, because it does not exist. If it did, we would not be in this situation today.

*Routine Proceedings*

I look forward to the debate throughout the rest of the day. I want to comment on the suggestion about the secret ballot for the election of the Speaker. When I first came here I thought it was kind of crazy that we had to do that. We all knew that the Liberals had the greatest number so we knew who would be the Speaker. I was actually quite surprised in my first term in 1997 that it actually did not work out the way I thought it would. I thought it was great because there really was a chance for people to do what they thought.

The next time around I did not wonder why we had a secret ballot. As much as we might respect each and every person in the House, for whatever reason there is always a twinge in the back of our minds that if whoever is in the chair, whether at committee or in the Speaker's chair, knows we did not vote for that person, we will not be treated fairly.

I say to my colleagues and you, Mr. Speaker, that I hope we can act responsibly here in the House. I hope the government, especially the Prime Minister, takes special note of what is happening here today. We are looking toward fairness and democracy in this Parliament because ultimately, it is Canadians who will benefit the most.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague for her excellent comments. She brought some figures to our attention with which I was not familiar in terms of the importance of balancing the different committees.

She informed us that 12 of the 17 committees were chaired by members from Ontario, nor was I aware that there were so many men chairing these committees.

I would also like it if she could reveal an important figure, and I hope she knows it. I would like to know how many Liberal members chair these committees. As far as I can tell, this seems to be at the heart of this debate. What the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs is proposing is a vote by secret ballot for committee chairs and vice-chairs.

I think it is worth noting that right now, not only is there an imbalance in terms of the number of women and in terms of regional representation, but there is also a problem in terms of political stripes, in the sense that I believe that in the vast majority of committees, the chairs and vice-chairs are Liberals.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** Mr. Speaker, yes, we all know that all but two committees are chaired by Liberals. Among the vice-chairs there has to be at least one Liberal member and one official opposition member.

The member also gave me the opportunity to comment on something which I failed to comment on. I appreciate the opportunity to do so now.

One of the things that came up was that the government would not have control. Earlier on it was mentioned that it is right that committee reports come back here to be voted on. That would give every member of Parliament the opportunity to vote accordingly, and in the case of the Liberals to do what the government wants them to

do. The committee sends the report back to the House for a vote and if it does not get accepted, the government does not have to do anything.

Why on earth does the government have to control the process at every single step along the way? It ultimately has control in the House if it has a majority. Why on earth can it not allow committees to operate and give the best projection of the views of people in Canada and committee members? Why can it not allow chairs to be elected? Why does the government have to control every single step of the process?

The government does this because the Prime Minister is a bit nervous. He does not want anybody to get out of line. He has to have all his ducks in a row at every step along the way with not one of them getting out of line. Heaven forbid he should not have absolute control over the entire caucus.

• (1305)

**Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to the amendment which the Liberals dropped in our lap at the 11th hour.

There is a lot of talk in the House today about committees being the masters of their own destinies. We found out in spades today that is not so. They do make recommendations to the House, but we find today House officers from the government side taking those recommendations and twisting them into a pretzel so that they no longer resemble anything near what the committee actually decided.

This is a question of control. Backbenchers and opposition members who should have some say in committee and make this work the way they think it should work are controlled by the Prime Minister's Office. The Prime Minister has a carrot and stick mentality to keep people onside, put his friends in place, reward them a bit and make things run better.

This is like some of the elections we have seen in other countries. We saw it in Iraq a short time ago when Saddam Hussein was elected again. There was a reason that. There was only one name on the ballot. That is basically what the Prime Minister and his henchmen over there are seeking to do with committee chairs. One name will be on the ballot and it will be an anointment, not an election. Whether it is a secret ballot or a show of hands, it is controlled by the Prime Minister's Office.

I sat here this morning and listened to the amendment put forward by the chair of the committee. It is counterproductive and completely counter to what he talked about in committee the other day. Today it has been reinforced by the deputy whip of the government. They want to hoist the recommendations of the committee for 15 sitting days. To that end, the committee did a tremendous job. It is not going to take 15 days to revisit this issue unless it is going to completely rejig the sitting members on the government side to hammer this through and come up with a different result.

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the amendment be amended by replacing the words "fifteen sitting days" with "one sitting day".

**The Deputy Speaker:** The subamendment is in order.

*Routine Proceedings*

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in debate today. I must admit that I had no plan to comment on the kind of behaviour we have witnessed here today.

Like just about every member who spoke before me, I will definitely talk about democracy. I will focus on the definition of democracy given by the Prime Minister of Canada.

I think it is pretty far removed from the major democratic issues in the history of western civilization, and eastern civilization for that matter. Democracy has not been debated for quite a while. It was probably instigated by the great Greek philosophers, who had a very comprehensive and well articulated definition of democracy. They practised what they preached.

Since I came here in 1993, I have been noticing a real erosion of democracy and ability to exercise any power.

There are several definitions. Winston Churchill said that democracy was the least objectionable political system, but I find that the goings on here today have set a new record for low.

For the benefit of those watching us, I would like to state the facts. A committee approved a report providing that, from now on, the chairs of all House committees may be elected by secret ballot. This would depart from what has been the practice these past years, with chairs being systematically appointed by the Prime Minister's Office.

Some people have felt that the concept of democracy that has come down to us over thousands of years and has become better and more sophisticated over time could not be allowed to regress to the state it was in in 1993, when a member got a call from the Prime Minister's Office saying "There are seven or eight of you, Liberal members, on this committee, and all of you are going to vote for so-and-so". The meetings are often run by the clerk. The first member to raise his hand is a Liberal member who nominates so-and-so. Because they are the majority, the Liberals all raise their hands, and so-and-so is elected. That is how it works. This is cutting a few too many corners.

Members who wish to speak on who should be elected as chair cannot do so, and a vote is taken. There follows the election of the first vice-chair. Hands go up. Again a Liberal member. The second vice-chair is usually a member of the opposition. I have also seen attempts by the Liberal Party to take over the whole meeting.

What is happening here today is terrible. It must also be understood that committees are democratic forums where we want to apply more flexible rules to give some weight to the opposition.

As Socrates used to say to Greek philosophers, opposition is important in a democracy. We know what happens in a country where there is no opposition. Do people think that Iraqis had a choice between Saddam Hussein and someone else? They had a choice between Saddam Hussein and Saddam Hussein. There was only one name on the ballot and they voted for him. Moreover, they were forced to vote.

We too, in committee, are forced to vote, but the vote is often controlled by the Prime Minister. It so happens that our Liberal

friends all vote the same way. Often, the opposition will split when it sees that it is beaten.

What is happening here today is important. People must realize that we cannot let democracy deteriorate like this. There must be a more flexible process in committee. We also understand how a democracy works.

Usually, before a vote is held, a debate takes place. We could talk about this for a long time too, and I have often condemned this situation. Whether it was on the sending of troops to Afghanistan or other issues, we had a number of debates. In the case of Afghanistan, the troops were already aboard and on their way overseas when we were discussing whether or not we should send them. We had a take note debate that was not followed by a vote. Is this a democratic way of doing things? One might well wonder.

As we can see, democracy is constantly being eroded. I think it is important to have this debate today. I also think that democracy is being somewhat undermined by the Liberal party.

● (1310)

What are the career aspirations of every backbencher? They involve a key: the key to the ministerial limo. That is what is important.

When the time comes to vote, what are the Liberal members thinking of? The limo and the key to the limo. If a minister gets in trouble, and has to step down, as often happens, then some backbencher is going to end up with the key to the limo on his desk. So all the Liberal MPs rush back to their office, where they wait for the phone to ring and someone to tell them they are going to get that key. That is their key concern.

When democracy is flouted and the position is filled by bulldozer, there are no problems. What we often hear from the members opposite is this "We got the power, because of our majority". I consider that to be flouting democracy to some extent. It is reducing democracy to a matter of a mere majority. When one exercises power, one must be far more subtle than that.

Now, for the people who vote. We have always said that, in a democracy, one vote is as good as another. And so, one MP should be as good as another. This, however, is not how the Liberal Party looks at it. In its view, the votes it records are the most important, and never mind democracy, or the opposition, which must exist if there is to be a democracy.

We have reached the point now where the Prime Minister calls all the shots, including committee appointments. There are two lines of defence for the Prime Minister: first the committee; since all of the Liberals must vote together, and they are all haunted and worried about their future and the limousine.

If things go wrong in committee and if there are a few members who take a courageous stand at this point and say, "I do not care about the limousine; they are asking too much of me", then there is the second line of defence, which is the House. Committees can study a matter for a few days. No reason to worry. The Prime Minister expects his Liberals to vote together. So, if there is a problem there, it is taken up again in the House.

*Routine Proceedings*

If that is going to be the case, I do not see the point in having committees. How is there supposed to be any intelligent debate in committee, when we know that we will never make it past the first line of defence. It is not the government members who will stymie us, but more the great Liberal democracy, because there are more Liberals than opposition members.

It seems to me that democracy has been distorted. There is another thing that I do not understand. We know that there is a leadership race going on, and that the member for LaSalle—Énard is touring from one end of Canada to the other talking about the great Canadian democracy. He has said that we must give more powers to the standing committees of the House of Commons. We have his speech here, we have seen it. Yet, when we move a motion that contains the exact same terms that the honourable and august member for LaSalle—Énard used publically, he stood and said, “I will vote against it”.

How is this logical?

**An hon. member:** The great democracy—

**Mr. Claude Bachand:** In public they talk about a great democracy, but when the time comes to act, they do the opposite. It gives one pause.

And everyone is worried about the keys to the limousines, because if there is a change, the limousines will also change owners. Some games are being played and, in my opinion, this is detrimental to democracy. Bills and everything else that is currently going on in the House and outside are being influenced by the Liberal leadership race. The government could care less about the public's concerns.

We witnessed some strange things this week. We asked questions of certain ministers and these questions were answered by other ministers or parliamentary secretaries, even though the minister responsible was in the House.

We are doing our best here, but we cannot perform miracles. The holy Liberal democracy has imposed its pattern. “Regardless of what the opposition may say or do, we will bulldoze right over it. And if we do not do it in committee, we will do it in the House of Commons.

•(1315)

This is a denial of democracy. The government does not listen to the opposition. No matter what the opposition may say, the government does not listen. This undermines democracy. It is necessary to have an opposition in a democracy. If there is no opposition, the government is free to do what it wants, and this is often detrimental to public interest.

This is why I am pleased to have had this opportunity to address this issue today. I will sit down and listen to other speakers. Of course, I am prepared to answer any questions from hon. members and I will be pleased to get the discussion going again.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are debating a motion to concur in a report related to the election of chairs and vice-chairs of standing committees of the House. There is an amendment and a subamendment but the essence is still the same, the democratization of Parliament. It is an important issue and I do

not think there is much disagreement within this place that it is something we constantly have to strive for to ensure that this place has the tools and the processes in place to do the business of the nation and to represent our constituents.

I find it interesting to hear the opposition members plead for democracy in Parliament when they know very well that Parliament, by its very nature, is a partisan institution. We ran in elections for a particular party, with a particular leader, with a particular platform and with a political philosophy which generally guides members in many of the activities and the positions that they take on issues. They are well discussed in advance.

Often parties do not agree on a lot of issues and sometimes members in this place would be accused of being sheep, voting the way they are told.

I think most members would agree that if members ran for a party with a leader and a platform and a matter on which they ran came before this Parliament, their constituents would expect them to support the position on which they ran. That means, notwithstanding that everyone would like to believe we were elected as individuals, that our word is our bond and our credibility is probably the most important asset that we could have in this place.

If I ran in support of a particular measure and said that if, as and when that matter comes before Parliament this is the position that I am going to take and it happens to be my party's position, well we know what happens. Members come here and it just turns out that everybody in a particular party would support a matter on which they ran.

We also know, however, that there are other details. There may be details below the main motion with which members may disagree. We have had many members in this place who have taken a position contrary to their party, and without consequences, I might add.

When we had the gun control debate in the 35th Parliament there were members who, on behalf of their constituents, felt that they could not support that. There was a consequence but it was kind of an inverse consequence in that they were taken off a committee that they were serving on and put on another lesser committee, et cetera.

I would think that most members here would agree that the consequence would be something whereby if a member were on a particular committee that the member would be put on a second committee to make sure the member's time was tied up. However that is getting a little bit away from it.

The point is that we are talking about democracy but we are talking about democracy in the context of a majority government. There is no question that to be a member in the opposition parties today there is an important responsibility and that is to keep the government accountable. It means that the opposition members must necessarily ask the tough questions. They must necessarily be disruptive when it is in their interest to demonstrate a point. It is in their best interest to obstruct the process or the progress of the House when again it would demonstrate a position on their behalf.



*Routine Proceedings*

We have had that before when we have had, for instance, a myriad of report stage motions which would require the House to vote on each and every time. It would have kept the House here, and did on a couple of occasions overnight and for 36 or 48 hours in a row, but that is the democratic process.

● (1320)

The suggestion that there is no democracy in this place is perhaps a misrepresentation of the realities of a partisan institution called Parliament. The fact is that demonstration, delay, obstruction, et cetera, are very important parts of the democratic process. It also is a fact of life that should a particular party win a majority in a general election, it is fully expected that it would implement its mandate and platform and continue to govern to the best of its ability. Its accountability is to the electorate as a whole.

It may not coincide with what the opposition would like to see, but it is doing its job when it raises issues such as absence of democracy or try to divide, conquer and all of those other things. There is no question that it is doing a very good job. I know many of the members very personally in this place and, notwithstanding what the perception of the public might be, there are some excellent relationships between members here because there is some excellent work done in a variety of our committees and on legislation. Real progress is made.

Unfortunately in this democracy we do have a thing called question period. Question period is a 45-minute period everyday. All the members are here and the press is in the gallery. What we basically have is a jump ball to see who can get the news clip or the television story for that evening's news or the next day.

Many of the people I talk to about this express some discontent about the optics of what parliamentarians look like during that 45-minute period. I would ask people to reflect on the following. Imagine that 300 people are put in a room, divided in half and told that all but 20 are to sit on their hands and say nothing. Then someone stands up and says something that is provocative. Could all but the 20 people actually just sit there and not react? We know what happens. There is reaction. In fact it is a longstanding parliamentary tradition of strategic heckling, of highlighting weaknesses in answers or of trying to throw someone off so that perhaps that person will make a mistake. Perhaps the individual is not so sure of his or her facts.

Every time a member speaks in this place, he or she is taking a risk. We may have immunity in this place to say things that members could not get away with outside this chamber, but people also watch what we say. The media watches what we say. Over a period of time the collective inputs or outputs of a member tend to characterize credibility. As I said at the beginning, the credibility of a member of Parliament is the largest, most important asset a member can have in this place.

If we were to look at the curricula vitae of members here, we would find that the vast majority of them come from a background where they have enormous credentials in terms of community service and contributions to their communities in a number of ways on a voluntary basis without compensation. Many of them became candidates and members of Parliament not for what they promised to do but because they showed what they can do. Candidates for public

office have a significant victory simply in garnering the nomination for their party.

There are a lot of people who run for political office who are very good people, who probably would make very good members of Parliament and who are not elected here. Quite frankly, people do not get elected to the House of Commons because they are good individuals. We cannot win elections as individuals. A person cannot run as an independent and win in this environment. It has to be someone who has a party with a platform and a team that can represent itself as being a government in waiting. It is up to the voters of Canada to determine which team they want to carry the torch for the country through the times of the day. A majority government has a very strong mandate and an important responsibility.

● (1325)

I understand the frustrations in opposition. I have not been in opposition myself, but many of my colleagues were before 1993. We have learned lessons. We know how opposition works and we know what its responsibilities are.

Committees are the subject of discussion here, and I suspect that we will have a lot more discussion not only on committees, but also on other appointments, whether they be order in council appointments or parliamentary secretary appointments, and other things that parties must do. However in this case there are current orders. In fact what is being proposed is that, with regard to the Standing Orders, the chairman of a standing committee would come from the government party and that of the two vice-chairs of a standing committee, one would come from the government side and the other from the opposition side.

In terms of the election, that means that since the government would have a chair and a vice-chair on all the standing committees except two, and with some exceptions, it really is not relevant what the opposition feels about who should be the chair of a committee. It really becomes the decision of a party. The question is whether this is a decision of the leader, the House leader, the whip or a collective decision of a caucus. Those things have to be discussed and I have a feeling they will be the kinds of discussions that will continue to go on for some time yet.

I must at least suggest to hon. members that even under the current rules of electing chairs, if there is unanimous consent of the committee, any standing committee can elect its chair by secret ballot, and that now happens in a couple of our committees. The move suggested here is not unusual or even foreign to our current rules, but it may impose it to a much broader or more general application.

I re-emphasize the point that a lot of members would like to say, and I have heard it from a lot of them, that this place is not a meritocracy. There have been discussions about the importance of regional balance, representations on various aspects of the business of Parliament and for each region to be properly represented and to have the input of people of that region because regions are different in a number of ways and are similar in a number of ways.

*Routine Proceedings*

Gender balance is important. I am a very strong supporter of gender balance. I have always been a very strong supporter of gender analysis in our legislation. It is a value system which individuals and parties would adopt. Indeed the Liberal Party has strongly respected the aspect of gender balance and of regional representation.

I am pretty sure that regions would be sensitive to and would notice whether they had representation in the cabinet. I am not sure if they would be aware or concerned about whether they had a balanced representation of parliamentary secretaries. I am not sure if they would be concerned about whether there was regional representation of committee chairs.

When we get down to the level that really hits the backbencher, and the discussion here with the cry for democracy is a backbench cry, committee work is where most of the good work of members is done, and having a good chair makes all the difference in the world. Every member has had an opportunity to experience an experienced chair, someone who has earned the respect of members of the committee, and maybe something quite different than that scenario. There is no question that, if anything, there is a consensus that we need to ensure that committees not only are functional, but have the opportunity to do the best work possible.

However, the reality is the opposition has a responsibility and that is to oppose the government at every opportunity, to embarrass the government, to make the government slip and get into contradictions. Its role is to try to make the government look bad.

• (1330)

However in that committee there are more times beyond partisanship when members work together. They want to ensure that legislation or studies before a committee are complete. They want to be proud to put their names to those studies. They want to be proud to get into the House and debate the important aspects of a piece of legislation or identify the areas where they maybe disagree with some remaining element of the legislation. That is democracy and it is part of the process.

Democracy in this place falls down when the partisanship takes over, but partisanship is part of democracy. The obstruction, the delays, the contradictions and hanging the House up are part of democracy. My hypothesis is that one cannot argue an absence of democracy in the House but one can shape it in a way in which it can do the best good on behalf of the people of Canada.

Canadians will not tolerate abuse of the House and this institution for partisan reasons ad nauseam. They still have to see work being done. Members, parties and any other special interest group that might influence this place have to be extremely careful not to push it to a point of abuse of Parliament.

We are discussing the concept of democracy. This has to be discussed in terms of a partisan reality and in terms of a majority situation. However as we change rules here, we have to take into account that those rules, if possible, should be a better fit to the realities of the day. We have had many changes in the way Parliament operates. The modernization committee, which was an all party committee, got together and made some important contributions to streamlining the processes of Parliament. I know there is an

appetite for extending that process even further so we can look at other ways of doing this.

I believe that if there is a consensus in this place which can get beyond the partisanship and the opposition mandate, there are areas within the modernization concept, or even through the procedure and House affairs committee, that should and could be discussed for the best interests of all parties.

The way in which it happens is the issue. It is not what is trying to be done; it is how it is being done. The opposition will make its best case that it made things happen here, and the government will do its best to ensure that it gets credit for what happens. That is part of it.

I want to use the last couple of moments to caution the House because we have to remember that this is a fragile institution. We have adopted certain changes in the rules of this place, for example, the application of votes. I do not like the application of votes because I am always coming across people who say we all vote like sheep, the same way. However when my whip stands and says "with all Liberal members voting this way" and every other whip gets up and does the same, what does the public perceive that to be? We made a mistake when we went to that system.

There are also the number of times when unanimous consent is required to do things in this place. The sensitivity in this place is such that, should there be a member who is disenchanted with this place, we could be ground to a halt. There could be concurrence motions put on the order paper. We could be debating committee reports every day which would grind the business of this place to a halt. We cannot let this happen.

I appeal to all members that, when we proceed with these discussions on the democratization of Parliament, they remember we are all responsible for ensuring that this is a functional Parliament.

• (1335)

**Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC):** Mr. Speaker, the member clearly talked around the issue and did it quite effectively, but he did not focus on the real issue. The real issue is the power of the Prime Minister and the PMO to have their way in the House on every issue all the time. That is the issue that I do not think we can skirt in this debate, because if they lose a vote in committee they will or will attempt to change the rules to vote over again, simply to get it their way.

It is unfair for the member to get up and waste the time of the House in skirting all around the issue. The issue is control, absolute control. It is the issue of the present Prime Minister versus the former finance minister, the would-be prime minister, if we will. I can see the Prime Minister today talking to his caucus just simply laying it on the line that it is either his way or we go to the polls. I would bet a dollar to a donut that is the threat he is squarely pointing back at his caucus to corner the former minister of finance's supporters versus the Prime Minister's supporters.

I would like to hear the parliamentary secretary for once address the honesty of the topic: simply the extreme power of the Prime Minister. Did the Prime Minister threaten them with an immediate election call if they did not all come in here and vote for the Prime Minister on this issue? In other words, if he did not get his way there would be a snap election.

*Routine Proceedings*

• (1340)

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Mr. Speaker, I think those who were following the debate and heard my speech should take this as an example of an opposition member doing his job. It is to take the situation and spin it or present it in a way that suits his purpose. I congratulate the member. I will give him a ten on being a good opposition member.

**Mr. John Reynolds:** Lots of good opposition here.

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Absolutely. There are some excellent members. The House leader of the Alliance says there are a lot of good opposition members. I have worked with members throughout this place and in all parties and I can list a large number of members who have made an enormous contribution.

First, though, the member said I skirted the issue and quite frankly I think I hit it very squarely by virtue of referring to the fact that we have a majority situation here. The Prime Minister of Canada today, someone who served this country over a 40 year period, was elected by the members of his party to be the leader of that party.

Suddenly such a person in that position represents that party and leads that party through an election. If he and his party win the election he becomes the Prime Minister. He is the only cabinet minister who is known on election day. That person has been given an enormous mandate, not only by his political party but also by the voters of Canada. That means he has to build a team. That means he has to make decisions. That means he is accountable, he is the bottom line, where the buck stops.

How much authority does that Prime Minister have to delegate down the line? As much as possible, because there are good people within caucus, but he cannot delegate and say let us have a vote on who will be in cabinet. Obviously there have to be some strategic choices and we cannot all participate in those discussions. What level would we go with next, with parliamentary secretaries, committee chairs or special caucus committees? There are various levels of appointments.

I would say to the member that what is happening now is an example of democracy and he should understand that in a majority situation someone must be in charge.

**Mrs. Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of comments to make, hoping that I will get a few responses from the previous speaker.

First, I find it a very unusual argument from the parliamentary secretary for public works when he talks about giving out jobs based on sex and based on ethnicity when we currently have two parliamentary secretaries for public works who are male and white and in the city of Mississauga, so I do not think that is working too well.

I think he talked about the majority of the committee selecting the chair because in fact the Liberals are the majority, but that is the sort of argument that causes the us and them argument in the House. Committees are not supposed to be like that and I would like him to comment on that. He actually suggested that the opposition should not be involved and I find that quite unusual.

He talked about the way things are done. I cannot resist commenting on the way this argument has gone today. Procedure

has been used to defer a vote into oblivion, so I would like his comment on the way things are being done here right now.

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Mr. Speaker, in this place we always want to have the highest respect and regard for other members regardless of party. It is always good to hear contrary opinions. It gives people a benchmark or a framework.

I would have expected the opposition to say there are two white male parliamentary secretaries from Mississauga and is that not terrible? But what the member did not say is that the two white male parliamentary secretaries now from Mississauga had to wait in line until after that member and another female member in Mississauga South were parliamentary secretaries before us, and there were no men, so in fact there is a perfect gender balance here. This is an excellent example of where a member would like to take the facts and spin them or twist them in a way that makes the point. I congratulate the member for being a good member of the opposition.

With regard to committees and how they operate, and maybe more important, the point she made about what is going on today, first, as a member of Parliament I have an opportunity and a responsibility to participate in debate and to have a position on almost any subject I want to. That is because this is a democracy. I may not agree with everything that the member has said, but I respect her right to have those positions.

What is happening today is part of the democratic process. I still firmly believe that the opposition has a role. It is to be totally contrary to the government's position and that is its job. One cannot be friends with the opposition.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** By their chattering I can see that the members all agree.

In this place we hear a lot of dissension. It yet again is evidence that democracy is alive and well in the House of Commons.

**An hon. member:** You didn't say that last week.

• (1345)

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, obviously my colleague from across the way was not here a little earlier, so I think it is important that we re-emphasize some facts about the committees as they were.

Before I do that, I also want to reference the government whip's remarks that it would make it hard for the government to ensure gender and regional balance among committee heads if they were elected. We all know, although obviously the member across does not know, that within committees right now, without the members being elected, there is no gender balance. There is no regional balance. Of 22 committees, 17 are chaired by men. Twelve of the vice-chairs and chairs are from Ontario. Where is the regional representation? Where is the gender balance?

There is a problem on that side. It is all the way across. If their own members, their own chairs, do not know what the heck is going on they need to take a look. It is a problem.

*Routine Proceedings*

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Mr. Speaker, let us take the point on Ontario. The member suggests that 12 of the vice-chairs are members from Ontario and asks where the regional balance is. She is probably correct. In terms of mathematics it should be more than 12 because two-thirds of the Liberal caucus are members from Ontario. It is not that there are too little from Ontario, it is that there—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. I heard the question, but I am having a great deal of difficulty hearing the reply. Please, let us just give each other the courtesy of listening and we will try to proceed with the remainder of the debate.

**Mr. Paul Szabo:** Mr. Speaker, the member wants to get it to committee. I am not sure I agree that it would be easy to achieve gender and regional balance at each and every committee. Quite frankly, I have been on committees where it was difficult to get quorum. I have been on committees that have been dysfunctional. We have work to do in terms of making sure that each committee does its job. In a cabinet scenario I certainly am very supportive of regional representation and gender balance. As we get down the line, certainly capable, qualified, respected and leadership people ought to be holding chair positions, and I will do what I can to ensure that we have the best possible people representing our committees.

• (1350)

**Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on this debate on the motion for concurrence in the report of the procedure and House affairs committee, a report that calls for changes to the way the chairs of committees are elected. We have an amendment to that which would return the issue to the committee and ask it to reconsider it and report back to the House in 15 days. We have a further subamendment which would have the committee report back in one day.

It seems to me what we are really talking about and what we have heard a lot about in the last year or so in relation to democratic reform has been the question of the power of government backbenchers. We have heard constant criticism from the opposition, and concerns from members on this side as well in some cases, about the question of whether or not backbenchers on the government side, members of Parliament who are not members of cabinet or parliamentary secretaries, have the kind of power they ought to have. I think that is really what members, certainly on our side, are interested in dealing with and interested in addressing. I guess the question is, how do we do that?

There is a variety of views on how we go about considering the question of how to give members of Parliament who are not members of cabinet more control over how government operates so that they can be more accountable to the public and so the public can see that the people they elect to Parliament are in fact having some say. I do not think the discussion that I have heard in the House or elsewhere has been about whether opposition members have had enough power. That is not the discussion I have heard. It has been about whether government members who are not in cabinet have enough power. It seems to me that this is what we have to focus on here. Within our own party we certainly are having discussions of late about the question of what we can do and how we can improve our own operations within our party and our caucus to ensure that

the views and concerns of members of Parliament who are not in cabinet are fully taken into account and that they have much more power.

When we consider the results of the last election and consider what the polls tell us, it is clear that the public prefers the Liberal Party as government. As my friend from New Brunswick Southwest pointed out a few minutes ago, the government was elected with something like 40% of the votes of Canadians across the country. But I want to suggest that when we look at the question of who is the second choice, if we ask Canadians who would not vote Liberal who their second choice would be, they would say the Liberal Party. I think that tells us that if we had what is called an ordinal system of elections whereby there is a runoff or a preferential ballot and the voter marks the first choice candidate, the second choice and so forth, we would in fact have even more Liberal members because members of the public as their second choice would more often choose Liberals.

What I am suggesting is that members on this side reflect much more clearly the views of the vast majority of our public than do those in opposition parties. Let us take for example the Alliance Party, which has, we have seen in polls, the support of something like 9% of Canadians. Are we suggesting that the members across the way in the Alliance who have that very small proportion of the voting public on its side really ought to be controlling how government operates? That is what this is about. This is what they have been trying to tell us today. It is all about them saying that in fact they are non-partisan, that they are not going to be partisan, that they want a non-partisan process. I think the idea of having the whip uninvolved in the process of choosing chairs is one where we are probably going in that direction. We will have to work on how it is going to work among ourselves but it is a positive thing. But clearly the suggestion that they should be controlling it does not make sense to me, and I do not think it is what the public is looking for.

• (1355)

I heard members yelling the word “dispense” earlier today. It seems to me that if members really believed in democracy, they would recognize that members in the House have the right to speak. Democratic reform involves everyone in the House having the right to speak their view. We should be able to have disagreement. Even within our party we clearly have disagreements on issues. That is valuable. It is important that we have those debates, but if members are suggesting here that it is unfair for a member to stand in this place and disagree with them, how can they claim to be democrats at all? It makes no sense at all. I cannot imagine where they are coming from.

When we talk about committee chairs, it is also important to realize that their role is a little different from the role of the Speaker. We do have a secret ballot for the election of the Speaker which was decided on a few years ago and which has worked very well. It is important that we look at this further and work out where we will go with this issue. We have to consider that a chair of a committee, unlike the Speaker, remains in caucus. He does not become independent in the way the Speaker does. A committee chair remains in caucus.

In Britain it is interesting that the Speaker, when the member is chosen as Speaker, does not usually have to run and does not have to re-offer against someone. The person is often unopposed. The tradition in Britain has been that the Speaker is not opposed in the next election. The person remains Speaker until retirement basically, so the Speaker truly becomes independent.

I do not think anyone is proposing that the chairs of committees do that. They have a different kind of role and it is important that we consider that.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I will interrupt the member, but of course he will have time to resume his intervention after question period. On a point of order, the hon. member for Peterborough.

**Mr. Peter Adams:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask for unanimous consent to revert to presenting reports from committees for the purpose of presenting the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the selection of votable items in accordance with Standing Order 92.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. member for Peterborough have unanimous consent to present his motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### TANZANIA

**Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to draw to the attention of the House a developing conflict between people on the island of Zanzibar, part of the United Republic of Tanzania. The matter was brought to my attention by a Canadian working in Africa and by Human Rights Watch.

On January 27, 2001 police and military on Zanzibar responded to political demonstrations at four locations by shooting and killing 35 persons and wounding 600.

I raise this now because I recall with sadness a human rights conflict question raised with me about 12 years ago involving a certain problem in Rwanda and where we failed to act and which evolved into one of the ugliest genocides perpetrated in the 20th century. We cannot make this mistake again.

I call upon the Government of Tanzania to act on the results of the commission of inquiry it has put in place, and ensure that conflicts based on class, race and religion are not exacerbated. I call on Canada and the Commonwealth partners to collaborate with Tanzania in ensuring that measures are taken that will induce political and racial harmony in that country before the price of neglect becomes more than humanity can pay.

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### OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

**Mr. Andy Burton (Skeena, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, development of the oil and gas deposits off Canada's west coast could be a significant contributor to the economic recovery of British

*S. O. 31*

Columbia. Progress to date has been prevented due mainly to provincial and federal restrictions currently in place.

Offshore hydrocarbon deposit developments are safely taking place around the globe: off the east coast of Canada, in the North Sea off Scotland and Norway, in the Gulf of Mexico, even off the coastlines of California and Alaska, just to name a few areas. The technology for safe, environmentally sound, offshore operation of the oil and gas industry is available, as has been proven worldwide.

I urge the B.C. provincial government and the federal Liberal government to move quickly toward lifting their moratoriums thereby allowing this potentially valuable resource the opportunity to proceed to the exploration stage.

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● (1400)

[Translation]

### JAMES BAY CREE

**Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the James Bay Cree will be able to deal with governments as equals in the application of commitments under recognized treaties.

This is the result of a ruling just handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada quashing an appeal lodged by Ottawa on September 5, 2001, against a Quebec Appeal Court decision. This was a decision recognizing the right of the James Bay Cree to deal with governments as equals vis-à-vis educational funding.

Grand Chief Ted Moses described this as an important ruling, because it puts an end to a years-long battle by the Cree to obtain the right to deal as equals with Canada and Quebec in decisions affecting Cree rights, in particular their cultural and language rights.

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### ACRYLIQUE WEEDON

**Mr. Gérard Binet (Frontenac—Mégantic, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, during SME Week, Acrylique Weedon received the Entrepreneurship Award of Excellence at a gala organized by the CLD of the Regional Municipality of Amiante.

Acrylique Weedon, manufacturers of top of the line acrylic tubs and showers, is a company with commitment, imagination, creativity and determination. Using cutting edge technologies, and premium quality raw materials, Acrylique Weedon produces superior products at highly competitive prices.

Entrepreneurs like Richard Couture, Marc Dussault and François Vaillancourt are an example of the entrepreneurial determination and audacity any region needs for development.

Bravo to Acrylique Weedon. Frontenac—Mégantic is proud of you.

*S. O. 31*

[English]

### SIKH COMMUNITY

**Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West—Mississauga, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was shocked to learn recently of a video game on the market called “Hitman 2” published by Eidos Interactive. This video game glorifies violence against Sikhs within a gurdwara, portrays Dalits as followers of an evil cult leader, and links both groups to terrorism.

Since the terrible tragedy of September 11, Sikhs, like other groups, have become victims of intolerance and sometimes violence based on their appearance alone. By connecting Sikhs to terror in this manner, “Hitman 2” is irresponsibly inciting hate and propagating destructive stereotypes.

Members of the Sikh community in Canada have raised money for hospitals and Foster Parents Plan. They organize sporting events and take food and clothing to food banks, all with little or no fanfare. They deserve better from society.

I urge all members of the House to sign the petition on sikhnet.com demanding that Eidos Interactive recall this game from the market immediately.

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### NOREEN EDITH PROVOST

**Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to one of my constituents, Noreen Edith Provost, who passed away on September 21 of this year.

Noreen was best known in a public sense for her work with Citizens United for Safety and Justice, work which won her the respect of police, many politicians and judges, and the victims of violent repeat offenders.

In 1992 Noreen was awarded the Governor General's Commemorative Medal for her significant contribution to her community and to Canada.

Despite all her hard work and the support of most Canadians, violent repeat offenders are still being released prematurely by the government to commit more crimes. Rest assured in Noreen's memory we will continue to hold the government accountable for its failure to protect Canadians from violent repeat offenders. We will insist that the rights of victims and their families are placed ahead of the rights of criminals.

Noreen's work for the victims of crime stands as an example to others. She will be sadly missed.

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### EATING DISORDERS

**Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to an ever growing health problem in Canada, the problem of eating disorders, most prevalent among young women.

Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness. In fact, the annual death rate associated with anorexia is more than 12 times higher than the annual death rate due to other causes combined for females between the ages of 15 and 24.

Canada does not have enough treatment centres for persons affected by eating disorders. In a recent survey from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, 77% of doctors surveyed said they did not have the skills to treat eating disorders. Sixty-six per cent said that the proper resources were not in place. The survey concluded that the treatment of eating disorders is a complex challenge for primary care physicians.

It is imperative that the Government of Canada through the Department of Health work to educate Canadians and the doctors about the serious and life threatening issue of eating disorders.

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● (1405)

[Translation]

### NORMAND DESBIENS

**Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Normand Desbiens, who teaches physics at the Cégep de Jonquière, on receiving the Prix du bénévolat en loisir et en sport Dollard-Morin.

Given annually by the Government of Quebec, this award recognizes the contribution made by volunteers to the organization and development of recreation and amateur sport in Quebec.

Since 1989, Mr. Desbiens has been a member of Expo-sciences régionale. He has been a member of the Conseil du loisir scientifique du Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean since 1991. He was also the founder of the “Science on tourne” project. The Dollard-Morin award therefore recognizes all of the work done by this popular teacher for the past 15 years.

The Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean has always distinguished itself in every field, and the honour bestowed upon Normand Desbiens is further proof of this.

Congratulations to Mr. Desbiens.

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[English]

### FATHER MICHAEL SMITH

**Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Father Michael Smith, a prominent member of my constituency who passed away last weekend at the age of 91.

Father Smith was not only well known in the Polish Canadian community for which he worked all of his long life, but also in a number of professional circles in Toronto.

Father Michael Smith, born in Alberta and educated in Poland, took care not only of the spiritual needs of his parishioners but also took an active interest in their social and economic well-being. He was instrumental in establishing the Polish Credit Union which serves over 30,000 members today in a dozen branches. He also helped establish the Copernicus Lodge, an exemplary seniors home in our community.

In recognition of his contributions, he was awarded the Order of Canada and the Golden Jubilee Medal.

As His Excellency Cardinal Ambrozic stated at the funeral service yesterday, indeed this week “we lost a giant of a man”.

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#### PRAIRIE FARMERS

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, it is a sad day today for western farmers.

In Lethbridge 14 farmers are going to jail rather than paying fines for transporting grain across the American border in 1996. These farmers sold their own grain. Some of them simply gave it away. For this they are going to jail.

Sadly the issue is one of unfairness. Eastern farmers may choose whether to sell their products independently or go to a marketing board. Western farmers are not allowed to market their own products. They must go to the Canadian Wheat Board.

Jim Chatenay, one of the 10 elected wheat board directors said, “It is an unbelievable outrage. The Canadian Wheat Board Act applies equally to all provinces in the dominion, yet we are applying the rules to farmers in only one part of the country”.

Western farmers are being treated differently from their counterparts in Quebec and Ontario. As a westerner and a farmer, I object to this obvious discrimination. I ask that the government apply the same rules to all parts of our country.

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#### INTERNATIONAL UNICEF DAY

**Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today is International UNICEF Day and since 1955, Canadians have opened their doors to trick-or-treating ghosts and goblins asking for candy and donations to UNICEF.

This year two million of those orange and black UNICEF boxes have been distributed to schools across Canada. The UNICEF slogan this year is “Put Your Heart into Halloween”. The money collected by our Canadian children will help to provide clean water, health care, education and good nutrition to children in developing countries.

UNICEF works to protect all children's rights, especially those who are disadvantaged, victims of war, disasters and extreme poverty, among others.

UNICEF is a permanent part of the United Nations system but is entirely dependent on voluntary contributions to accomplish its work.

Tonight when their doorbells ring, I encourage all Canadians to please remember, not only the Halloween candies but also a donation to UNICEF, and to put their hearts into Halloween.

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#### PARLIAMENTARY REFORM

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on what can only be called a sad day for democracy, the Liberal government has utilized procedural mischief to block debate on what would have been a small baby step toward improving parliamentary democracy in Canada.

*S. O. 31*

The motion on the floor, should the Liberal government have allowed it to proceed, would have simply allowed standing committees to elect their chairs by secret ballot votes, free from coercion and intimidation of the Prime Minister's Office.

As a former prime minister today cautioned the House, democracy loses its strength gradually by increments and it takes vigilance and a concerted political will to stem the erosion of democracy by those who would seek to concentrate power in the hands of a few.

Never before in the history of Canada has power been concentrated in the hands a few, a small handful of unelected political flaks in the Prime Minister's Office.

Today we had the opportunity to take a step toward a better, fairer and more balanced Parliament. Let the record show it was the Liberal Party that stopped it, with the exception of one courageous Liberal member who had the conviction to vote in favour of parliamentary reform.

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●(1410)

[*Translation*]

#### IRAQ

**Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, a close sparring match is being played out at the UN Security Council between the United States, supported by Great Britain, and the other countries that have a veto, France, Russia and China.

The United States wants one single resolution that would include strengthening the mandate of inspectors, and in the event that Iraq refuses to comply, the clear threat of punitive measures, which the United States could take without going back to the UN Security Council.

Among the 10 non-permanent member states, Mexico, a neighbour of the U.S. and a significant trading partner, supports the French position, which requires a new decision by the security council before an attack is launched against Iraq. Mexico had the courage to defend the primacy of the United Nations, even regardless of the threats expressed by U.S. newspapers. Yet Canada, a NAFTA partner, could only say its position was close to that of the U.S. and that it wanted a strong resolution.

When will Canada have the strength to take a position vis-à-vis the United States that reflects its values and its history?

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[*English*]

#### PERFORMING ARTS AWARDS

**Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to congratulate the recipients of the Governor General's outstanding lifetime achievement in the performing arts.

*S. O. 31*

This year's distinguished award recipients are: Quebec film and TV director, André Brassard; actor, playwright, teacher and arts advocate, Joy Coghill; the greatest band in Canadian history, The Guess Who from Winnipeg, including founder and singer/guitarist Randy Bachman, lead singer and keyboardist Burton Cummings, drummer Garry Peterson, guitarist Donnie McDougall and bass player Bill Wallace, who lives in my riding; ballerina, Karen Kain; jazz musician, composer and educator, Phil Nimmons; and creative dancer and choreographer, Jean-Pierre Perreault.

I would also like to congratulate Father Fernand Lindsay on his receipt of the Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Voluntarism in the Performing Arts and Angelia Hewitt for receiving the National Arts Centre Award.

I am sure the House will join me in extending our sincere congratulations to all of this year's award recipients.

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**IRAQ**

**Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will join me in wishing Rosie feels better soon.

Having said that, there is no war in Iraq and there does not need to be one. Iraq has said that it will allow UN weapons inspectors total unfettered access to all sites in its country. The solution is at hand but the UN weapons inspectors are still sitting on their hands while the UN decides what to do.

If Iraq is truly serious about letting weapons inspectors in, I propose that it locate its own interim, credible, international inspectors, bring them to Iraq and put them to work now. Iraq has the right to do this, the same as any other country does.

If Iraq does allow unconditional access to all its sites, it will only be a few weeks before the whole world will know that Iraq intends to keep its commitment and the situation will be diffused. There will be no war.

There is no reason to wait. Iraq should move now to send a signal to the entire world that it is determined to cooperate.

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**DISABILITY TAX CREDIT**

**Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents have expressed concerns about what seem to be changes to the way the disability tax credit is being administered. I know the House has been assured by the Minister of National Revenue that no changes have in fact taken place, but Canadians are still concerned about the fate of the tax credit.

It is imperative that the government be accountable for how it spends taxpayer money. It must also be compassionate.

I urge the government to reassure Canadians that the qualifications for its disability tax credit will be thoroughly reviewed and that no one will wrongly lose that credit. It is very important to people in my riding and to people across the country.

**QUEEN'S JUBILEE MEDAL**

**Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, during the recent parliamentary break I was privileged to award 20 outstanding constituents with the Queen's Jubilee Medal in my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan. These people are: Jessie Anderson, Shannon Breeze, Kathleen Skovgaard, Heather Turnquist, Barkley Logan, Mike Murphy, Major-General Roy Sturgess, Sandra Heydon, Joan Mayo, Brenna MacPherson, Janet Thompson, Alaina Tuba, Mike Caljouw, Robert George, Pat Edge, Kate Hall, Grace Elliot-Nielsen, Pat Barron, Michael Lynch and Albert Uden.

Those worthy recipients were selected by a constituency based committee made up of Marcia Stobbart, Cleone Ratcliffe, Ed and Gwen Melynk, and Merv Unger.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for the excellent work they have done on my behalf. The recipients that they chose are dedicated and hardworking community volunteers who represent thousands all across my riding. All our communities rely on people like these to provide a wide variety of much needed services to Canadians.

I congratulate them all.

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● (1415)

[Translation]

**CANADIAN PEACEKEEPERS**

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, allow me to acknowledge the exceptional contribution of the Canadians who work every day to help maintain peace around the world.

These people include residents of Laval. Captain Lucie Rosa, Sergeant Mario Gagné, Corporal Francis Lemay and Corporal Angelo Roselli are all many miles away from their families and friends, and are working tirelessly to maintain peace around the world.

Canadian peacekeepers are constantly working to maintain peace, protect people, confiscate illegal weapons and clear large areas still full of landmines that claim new victims every day, all over the world.

I join with all Canadians in congratulating these men and women who fully deserve our recognition for their work. Their task is a considerable one, and it is only through perseverance that, some day, we will succeed in making this situation a thing of the past.



*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[English]***PRAIRIE FARMERS**

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, today some hardworking prairie farmers are going to prison. Why? Because they grew their own wheat on their own land, doing their own work, taking their own risks. Yet this government says they cannot market their own product. It is an industry that is going bankrupt yet the government puts farmers in jail for trying to make a living.

My question is very simple. Why is the government throwing farmers in jail for selling their own wheat?

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. The protesters from 1996, who are facing the difficulty in Lethbridge today, have chosen this particular route to express themselves. They chose this particular method. It was not imposed upon them. They have been seeking to maximize their publicity in this matter. That is their right. However, let us be clear, the choice with respect to the jail proceedings is one that was chosen by them.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to see that member make the choice, that lawyer make the choice of running in a rural riding in Saskatchewan.

The government chose to make it illegal for prairie farmers to market their own grain. The government chose to change the rules to ensure this was the case. The government chose to have a completely different set of rules for western Canada than for eastern Canada. The government also chose to charge these farmers.

Why is the government refusing to allow prairie farmers the same right to market their own grain that it gives to other Canadian producers?

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with respect to the comparison to Ontario, it should be noted that in fact grain is marketed in and from Ontario under the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board. The flexibilities that have been achieved in Ontario have been achieved by the democratic decisions taken by the directors of the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board. The act of the Canadian Wheat Board was amended in 1998 to provide directors of the Canadian Wheat Board in western Canada with the ability to make the same decisions in western Canada.

**Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, it blames the farmers. The government is losing a grip on its own caucus. It should loosen its grip on western farmers.

It is hiding behind the board. It is a government that allows child pornographers to go free but jails farmers. It is a government that allows Hezbollah to operate in Canada but denies farmers the freedom to sell their own wheat. Today, farmers will be handcuffs

because of the policies and decisions made by the Canadian Wheat Board and the minister.

For prairie farmers and their families, I ask one more time, why are they being locked up for doing what should be legal and is legal in the rest of Canada, selling their own product?

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. If any farmer wishes to export wheat from any part of Canada, it requires an export permit. That applies nationally across the country.

The changes we made in 1998 include these facts: the Canadian Wheat Board is no longer a crown corporation; it is no longer run by government appointees; and it is controlled by a board of directors with a two-thirds majority directly elected by farmers themselves. All the powers of the Canadian Wheat Board are vested in those directors.

• (1420)

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, it is Halloween today and the Liberals' policy is as pathetic and scary as their responses.

Today the Liberal government will throw prairie farmers in jail for what is perfectly acceptable in the rest of Canada, selling their own wheat. This is not a complicated issue. Farmers should have the individual right to sell their property to the buyers of their choice.

When will the government stop throwing farmers in jail and give them the freedom to market their own wheat?

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the legislation that was enacted in 1998 provides very clearly for how the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board can be changed. That mandate requires consultations with the board of directors and it requires a vote among prairie producers.

Interestingly, when we debated that legislation in 1998, this side of the House wanted to put in provisions that would allow farmers to trigger the whole change process and that was taken out at the request of the opposition.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh.

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I encourage members who want to carry on discussions that are not on the record to do so perhaps in the lobby. Those of us who are in the House want to hear the questions that are asked. The member for Crowfoot has the floor and everyone will want to hear his question.

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, the only thing more distasteful than this policy is the government's refusal to take responsibility for it.

*Oral Questions*

In 1996 the first farmer to be charged with selling outside the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly was found innocent. Immediately the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board rushed out to change the regulations, ensuring that all subsequent charges would result in a conviction.

When will the minister admit that he is personally responsible for sending those innocent farmers to jail?

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman's allegations are patently ridiculous. What is being suggested here by the opposition is that there should be some intervention in a court proceeding. That would obviously be an ethical violation and I will not do it, even when requested by the official opposition.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**BUDGET SURPLUS**

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister made the use of the surplus the major issue of the last federal election, promising a balanced approach, whereby 50% of the surplus would be used to lower taxes and reduce the debt, and 50% would be reinvested in the economy and in social programs.

Will the Prime Minister admit that we are far from the promised balance and that in fact it is 100% of the surplus that was used to pay down the debt?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it may not be 50-50, but very close to 50-50, actually 45-55. Of course, when there is an \$8 billion surplus in the last week or month of the year, it would be irresponsible to try to spend this surplus just to ensure the balance. Under the acts of Parliament, at the end of the year, the surplus is automatically applied to debt reduction, which enables us to keep interest rates very low, which in turn helps all Canadians pay less for their mortgages and make purchases at lower prices because our economic policy has produced very favourable economic conditions for all Canadians.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the kind of nonsense we have just heard from the Prime Minister comes as no surprise from people who deliberately ignore things and hide surpluses.

The federal surplus reached \$17 billion in 2000-01, nearly \$9 billion in 2001-02, and the Bloc Québécois estimates that it will exceed \$10 billion this year. If nothing changes, all \$36 billion will be used to pay down the debt.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that, had he kept his promise, instead of applying the whole amount to the debt, \$18 billion could have been put toward health, while at the same time paying down the debt?

•(1425)

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have very difficult problems to address. We have too many people at work in Canada. So far this year, 400,000 new jobs have been created, for a total of 2.5 million since 1993, and this is

bringing in more revenue than expected. We are in the very unfortunate position of being too successful in reducing the debt and, consequently, the burden for future generations.

**Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in his economic statement yesterday, the Minister of Finance used the same strategy as his predecessor, which was to considerably underestimate the coming budget surplus in order to keep tens of billions of dollars out of the public debate on how it should be used.

Will the Minister of Finance admit that he has deliberately concealed the true figures on the surplus in order to continue to deny the existence of a serious fiscal imbalance between Ottawa and the provinces?

**Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I hope indeed that government revenues will be higher than forecast. I believe this would be a good thing. At any rate, we know the debt level of the provinces is half that of the federal government. When we make payments, like the nearly \$9 billion we paid last year, this will reduce the Government of Canada's interest rates by \$400 million for this year, next year, and the year after that. The interests of Canadians are well served by this.

**Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, taxes to Ottawa and to Quebec are paid by one and the same individual.

Does the minister not understand that the present fiscal imbalance is the result of individuals paying too much tax to Ottawa compared to the services they get from the federal government, and that a portion of these taxes would be put to far better use if it went to the level of government responsible for health care in particular?

**Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the provincial governments have reduced the taxation level in the provinces, presumably because they decided that the taxpayers were paying too much to their provincial governments.

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[English]

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

More and more otherwise proud citizens are worrying about the value of their Canadian passports these days and with good reason. Canadians citizens are being fingerprinted, photographed, arrested and detained at the U.S. border. Why has the government not filed a formal written complaint to the United States demanding an end to this practice? What is it waiting for?

**Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I told the member in committee this morning we have filed complaints with the United States. As I said to the member and as I have said in the House, a Canadian is a Canadian for all purposes. We maintain that. We maintain it with our American authorities. I have also said that the American authorities will work this out with us in a spirit of neighbourliness.

*Oral Questions*

I wish to report to the House today that I spoke to Mr. Cellucci just before I came here. He informed me that, in the future, Canadians carrying Canadian passports will not be treated any differently depending on where they were born or for any reason whatsoever.

**Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, after weeks of a faint whisper about this trampling of Canadian rights it sounds like we are finally getting somewhere. I want to applaud the minister if in fact he has gained an absolute guarantee that the rights of Canadian citizens will be protected and that our Canadian passport will indeed mean the same thing for all Canadians.

I want to ask the minister if he would report to the House when this practice will be initiated and what guarantee there is to an end to this obscene practice?

**Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the first place, the important thing is to say that, as usual, we are working out these matters. It is our common security between Canada and the United States, and we work out these matters together as friends and neighbours.

The American ambassador made it clear that he has spoken with both Mr. Ashcroft and Mr. Powell. They have given firm assurances that this matter will be dealt with by the American administrative authorities in a way that will ensure that the place of birth in a Canadian passport will not in any way affect individuals crossing the border and that all Canadians will be treated as Canadians when travelling on Canadian passports.

\* \* \*

●(1430)

**TERRORISM**

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC):** Mr. Speaker, the House is pleased that our passports will be respected but there are still basic concerns about our security arrangements.

In April CSIS confirmed that it had been monitoring Hezbollah terrorist activity in Canada since at least 1999. That same year in Montreal CSIS questioned Mohamedou Ould Slahi, who recruited two of the terrorist pilots. The week following the September 11 attacks, in response to my question, the Prime Minister said in the House:

—there is no link to any group in Canada with what happened in New York and Washington last week.

Is that still the government's position?

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as the member should be aware we have now listed seven entities and are taking the necessary steps to ensure that our efforts are justified and effective. CSIS is doing its job in protecting international security and safety of Canadians, and doing the necessary investigations to see if other listings should come forward. It is working on that matter.

**Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC):** Mr. Speaker, in his unauthorized speech to the Toronto Board of Trade the Minister of National Defence said:

I don't know the probability of a terrorist attack in Canada but I do know that it is significantly greater than zero.

My question is to the Prime Minister. Have ministers been briefed on the possibility of a terrorist attack on Canada? If so, why was the Minister of National Defence not among the ministers briefed?

**Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, like other ministers I have received many briefings about terrorism and the likelihood of attacks. However, it is true that there is not one person on this whole planet who can give us a scientifically accurate probability that such a terrible thing may occur.

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**CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA**

**Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, today the Supreme Court moved from the law courts to the theatre of the absurd. It gave a motorcycle gang member and a prisoner convicted of first degree murder the right to vote in federal elections. In so doing it debased the value of our democratic system and the franchise of every Canadian citizen.

Will the Minister of Justice stand up for Canada and condemn this disgraceful decision?

**Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first let me totally disassociate myself from the remarks of the hon. member that Supreme Court decisions are disgraceful. This is not the view of people on my side of the House and hopefully not of anyone else.

The decision taken today by the Supreme Court was a split decision, five to four. The government will review this decision and determine to what extent it can legislate in the future. The Supreme Court, as far as I know, did not say that there was no room to legislate, and that is not the same thing that the hon. member is alleging.

**Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, I stand by my words that it was a disgraceful decision. Prisoners in penitentiaries choose to commit horrible crimes against their fellow citizens. Providing convicted murderers with the right to vote undermines the legitimacy of government and the rule of law.

Will the Minister of Justice immediately table a constitutional amendment to overturn the effect of this perverse ruling?

**Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, asking the same question with other words does not change the facts. The court ruled in the past that it was unconstitutional when there was a total ban on inmates voting. We changed that to a two year ban. It has now said that is not the required amount. We will review the decision in great detail and respond to the House.

However, the suggestion of the hon. member regarding what he calls disgraceful behaviour by the Supreme Court is not one which I nor anyone else on our side of the House would associate with and he should know better as a lawyer.

*Oral Questions*

●(1435)

[Translation]

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Finance really tried everything to hide the magnitude of the surplus that the federal government will rack up in the fiscal years to come. We are used to this attitude, since his predecessor was off by as much 500% in his forecasts. This is no small matter.

Will the Minister of Finance admit that, if he presented the real figures, the ones that are more likely to reflect the reality, he would no longer be able to publicly reject a debate on the fiscal imbalance?

**Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is no fiscal imbalance. We know that the Bloc Québécois thinks there is a fiscal imbalance when there is a federal surplus, but it does not talk about an imbalance when there is a federal deficit.

The level of the deficit in the 20 years prior to 1997 was much higher than the level of the surplus in the past four or five years.

Therefore, I presume he thinks that it is justifiable for the provinces to help reduce the federal government's accumulated deficit.

**Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister announced, in spite of what the Auditor General said, that he would increase the number of foundations and invest billions of dollars in them. This is money that will not be included in the budgetary process. The minister even created a second contingency fund, in addition to the one that already exists.

Will the minister admit that, had he not done this, the magnitude of the actual surplus that the government will have in the coming years would be such that he would not be able to avoid a discussion with the provinces, and will he admit that he has too much taxing power given his responsibilities, while the provinces have a hard time fulfilling their own responsibilities, particularly as regards health care?

**Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, both levels of government have the same taxing powers, except that the provinces also collect royalties on natural resources and lotteries. I know that there is a great deal of uncertainty. Making forecasts is not an exact science.

We also know that, in the United States, they anticipated a surplus in excess of \$200 billion for last year, but they now have a deficit of over \$165 billion.

I prefer to make mistakes that result in a surplus rather than a deficit.

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[English]

**PARLIAMENTARY REFORM**

**Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, apparently there was a time when the Prime Minister believed in democracy. Now he argues against such small democratic advances as secret ballot elections of chairs and vice-chairs of parliamentary committees.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Why can he not bring himself to trust all members of his caucus to pick their own chairs and vice-chairs by secret ballot?

**Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that this issue is before the House. I even offered this morning to collapse the debate and have a vote on it. The record will show that his party decided otherwise and filibustered for the rest of the morning to avoid having a vote on it.

**Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely inaccurate. This minister said that. The last four speakers in the House were his members. We were waiting for it to collapse and have a vote. It is not true what the minister said.

In 1990 the Prime Minister told the *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal* "You cannot not say that what you do does not matter, and that you are right and everyone else is wrong. That is not democracy", he said, "that is a dictatorship".

What is the difference between that dictatorship he described in 1990 and the steel fisted way he runs his caucus and parliamentary affairs today?

**Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. members in that party, after putting some of their own members in the doghouse for months and some for years because they did not like the way they behaved on committee and otherwise, are hard pressed to make these kinds of remonstrances against other members of the House.

If the hon. member wants this issue to come to a vote, I am quite prepared to do so and let the democratic will of the House decide.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, 33 years after the Official Languages Act was passed, Air Canada continues to violate it. Unable to assign bilingual staff to certain flights, the company is asking French-speaking passengers to switch flights, instead of respecting their rights.

Does the Minister of Transport find it acceptable that after 33 years, Air Canada is still unable to comply with the law?

●(1440)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my office in fact contacted Air Canada today and Air Canada will be looking into this matter, which is of great concern to the Government of Canada.

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, this has gone on for 33 years. That is long enough. In defence, Air Canada said yesterday that it was applying Department of Transport directives.

Can the minister tell us who is telling the truth? Is it Air Canada or the Department of Transport that is in violation of the law?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the response of my colleague is totally accurate with respect to the official language provisions as they apply to Air Canada. Transport Canada regulations provide that security briefings be given in both languages at all times. It also provides that those persons seated at an exit understand and be fully conversant with the flight crew.

It is not a question of the safety regulations, as my colleague, the minister, has just said. It is a question of whether Air Canada has enough bilingual personnel to do the safety job, and that is in question.

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**TERRORISM**

**Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, CSIS documents today continue to painfully reveal that Hezbollah terrorists are using Canada as a home base and that the government has no way of tracking where their fundraising goes. That coincides with the Israeli government arresting and charging a Canadian with helping to kill Israeli citizens in Hezbollah's terrorist attacks.

With Hezbollah's 20 year history of terrorist activity in many countries and with the recent revelations of Canada's own intelligence agency, what exactly does a terrorist group have to do to get banned in Canada?

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned previously, there has been a number of entities listed. CSIS does the investigation to see if there are other groups. There is no question that CSIS is aware that there are potential terrorist groups operating in Canada, but in terms of doing the analysis, it has to protect the interest of public safety and security and also the privacy interests of Canadians.

**Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, the new minister is learning quickly how not to answer questions. I will try another one on him. The former CSIS director, Mr. Reid Morden said:

I'm sure there is a very large political calculation in the nervousness with which the government is clearly addressing this. I guess I feel rather critical of that.

Here we have the former director of CSIS suggesting the government will not ban Hezbollah because it wants to placate certain interest groups that support the Liberals.

By failing to ban all fundraising and other activities of the terrorist group Hezbollah, is the Liberal government being naively negligent or grossly partisan? Which of those two is it?

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would refer the hon. member to the SIRC just tabled in which it addresses not this specific issue, but finding the balance. I will quote from the document. It says:

In watching over the activities of CSIS, the Review Committee helps ensure that balance is maintained. Although we must be sensitive to public and expert opinion—and take deliberate steps to inform ourselves—we must also take care not to be unduly swayed.

The SIRC report is saying is that CSIS is doing its job and doing it correctly.

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources. I am pleased that the government has set a target of 1 billion litres of ethanol to be produced each year by 2010.

Would the Minister of Natural Resources explain to the House and to all Canadians how the government plans to meet these targets?

**Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex for her good work in terms of ethanol and the rural caucus. They have been moving this agenda forward. That is why the Government of Canada has exempted the excise tax up to 10¢ for ethanol. We have invested in loan guarantees. We are investing in research and development. Part of our climate change plan is to ensure that more ethanol is used in fuel so we can protect the environment and do our job on climate change.

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● (1445)

**COAST GUARD**

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the men and women who work for our coast guard are some of the bravest people in Canada, willing to risk their lives at any moment to save the lives of mariners around the world. Those same people feel very let down by their government in terms of continuous cutbacks to the coast guard. The Minister of National Defence should be congratulated for seeking more revenue than resources from his cabinet.

I directly ask the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to speak to the men and women of the coast guard. Will he now go to his cabinet and fight for more resources for the brave men and women of our coast guard?

**Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to join with the member for Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore and say that the Minister of National Defence serves as an example to us all.

I agree with the member that the men and women of the Canadian Coast Guard do a great job. The Government of Canada takes the recapitalization of the coast guard very seriously. In the year 2000 we committed \$115 million for the replacement of over 40, 47 foot life boats. Half of them have been delivered and the other half under are construction.

At cabinet we discussed the future capitalization requirements of the coast guard, and I discuss this with the Minister of Finance, not in press conferences.

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**PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister for HRDC claims she is concerned about Canadians with disabilities, but in B.C. up to 18,000 people with disabilities could be eliminated from benefits because of Gordon Campbell's draconian policies.

*Oral Questions*

Why is the minister's government so willing to defend corporate rights when it comes to international agreements, but ignores the rights of the poor and disabled as defined in international agreements and committed to by her government? Why is her government so silent on defending these basic human rights as defined in international agreements? Why is she not standing up and defending those people in B.C.?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Canadians with disabilities the government has a long and positive track record. I want to remind the hon. member of the fact that through our opportunities fund we invest over \$40 million a year ensuring that Canadians with disabilities have got access to the workplace.

I also want to remind the hon. member that every year the government transfers \$193 million to the provinces to assist Canadians with disabilities find employability.

We continue to work with our provinces to build a system of employability to ensure that Canadians have the support they need to work in the Canadian economy. We will continue to work with them.

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**FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

**Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said in the House on Tuesday, "The Minister of Finance has all authority on the Bank Act". That is what the Minister of Finance thought too when he encouraged bank merger discussions this summer.

Why did the Prime Minister reverse the decision of his own finance minister by shutting down these bank merger discussions? Does he not trust his minister's judgment on this issue?

**Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there was no decision to reverse. There is a law. It was passed last year in the House, called Bill C-8. It provides for formal applications for mergers. If banks wish to make a proposal under the law, they are perfectly free to do so.

**Mr. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, PC):** Mr. Speaker, according to senior bank officials, at Scotiabank and the Bank of Montreal, they were told by the finance minister to explore merging. The same bank officials also say that the Prime Minister's Office shut down the merger talks saying that there would be no bank mergers until after the Prime Minister's retirement in 2004.

Would the Minister of Finance please explain the relevance of the Prime Minister's retirement schedule to the Canadian banking industry?

**Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the people who the member refers to said the things he claims they said. If they did, they are not true.

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[Translation]

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, after the events of September 11, the United States passed antiterrorism legislation in

less than 11 weeks. The Liberals, however, took 13 months and three attempts to present legislation that was clearly inferior to what the Americans came up with.

Why must Canadians wait so long for so little when it comes to their safety?

[English]

**Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is a very good reason for that. After reflection and debate in the House, the government listened to members on this side and on the other side and improved the legislation. That is why we introduced Bill C-17 today, an improved bill that will guarantee our security.

**Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, September 11 happened and inside of 11 weeks the U.S. house of representatives drafted a bill, passed it through the house, passed it through the senate and had a signature from the president of the United States. It has taken this government 13 and a half months and three drafts to put together a piece of legislation that does nothing to address the port securities in this country and the fact that Hezbollah is operating in Canada. The government does not take terrorism seriously.

Why does it take the government so long to deliver so little on our country's security?

• (1450)

**Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member has not done his homework. The fact is within the same time frame as the U.S., we passed Bill C-36 and Bill C-44, and we have a third bill that will go through that reflects the opinions of everyone in the House.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**ÉCOLE DE MÉDECINE VÉTÉRINAIRE DE SAINT-HYACINTHE**

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture stated that the veterinary college in Saint-Hyacinthe was not the only one awaiting accreditation, but that there were three other colleges outside Quebec.

Based on our experience of the closing of the francophone military college in Saint-Jean, after points similar to those raised by the minister yesterday were made, are we not at risk of soon learning that the same low blow will be dealt to the college in Saint-Hyacinthe, the only French-speaking one in North America?

[English]

**Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is no reason for the veterinary college at Saint-Hyacinthe to close.

[Translation]

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister does not seem to realize how urgent the situation is. The dean of the college has to report to the American Association of Veterinary Medicine by December, confirming whether or not he will be able to make the necessary changes to the college to ensure its continued accreditation.

Given the urgency, is the minister not able to say today that he will indeed meet this deadline of December, and provide the \$59 million that is required?

[English]

**Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I recently have said several times in the House, we realize the importance of the veterinary college in Saint-Hyacinthe and the other three locations in Canada. We as a federal government will work in every way we possibly can to ensure that all our veterinary colleges continue to play an important role, not only for animal health and safety but for human health and safety because they play an important role as well.

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#### KYOTO PROTOCOL

**Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, March 12 of this year in response to a question that I directed to the Minister of Natural Resources in the standing committee, the minister stated:

—I wouldn't sign a contract unless I knew the cost. I think it just makes good sense. My view is the same. It hasn't changed on this.

It appears that the minister's view has now changed and now he is in support of signing the Kyoto contract without knowing the cost. Why?

**Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have said right from day one that it is important to do our due diligence and that is what we have been doing. It is important to consult with Canadians and that is what we have been doing.

The hon. member asked for costs. We clearly have stated in the draft plan, for example in the oil sands, what the cost is per barrel for the oil producers. It ranges for synthetic and bitumen from 10¢ to 12¢ a barrel. We have clearly outlined to Canadians what the cost is for industry and we will continue doing work.

My position has not changed. It is exactly the same as it was when I became minister in January of this year.

**Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Canadian Alliance):** If that is true, Mr. Speaker, why does the industry itself claim that the cost in the tar sands is from \$3 to \$7 a barrel? His figures are out to lunch.

Yesterday in New Delhi the international community once again turned down the minister's proposal on credits for clean energy exports, which will drive the cost even higher than the government's proposed plan.

Why will the government and the minister not come clean with Canadians and tell us what the Kyoto plan is going to cost us?

**Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member will go and read the draft plan that

#### Oral Questions

we have put forward. We are consulting with the provinces, with Canadians and with industry to get their input so that we do have a plan that is workable, that is balanced and that does not create an unfair or unreasonable burden on any one part of the country or any one sector.

The Alliance Party will vote against every environmental initiative in the House. It is obvious that it will not support anything that is to improve the environment in this country.

\* \* \*

#### CANADIAN HERITAGE

**Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage. November 11 is a very special day for all of us each year. It is a day on which we remember those who fought and died for our freedom.

Some of my constituents have noticed that not all government departments lower their flags on that very special day. Would the minister describe to us government practices with respect to the lowering of flags on Remembrance Day?

● (1455)

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in eleven short days we will all be in our constituencies to honour the contribution of those who gave their lives for the country.

I am happy, on behalf of all of us, to recognize that the Government of Canada has this year issued a new directive that on November 11 all flags at government offices and facilities across the country will be at half-mast. We certainly encourage provincial and territorial counterparts to exercise the same show of respect for the veterans of Canada.

\* \* \*

#### FINANCE

**Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, just two days ago the PMO said that there would be no bank merger proposals considered until after the Prime Minister's retirement in early 2004. At the same time, the finance minister has said that there is no ban on merger proposals.

Will the finance minister confirm today that it is he who has the final say on bank merger proposals, not the Prime Minister?

**Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I refer the hon. member to the Bank Act and to Bill C-8 in the last session, rather than to whatever day's newspaper he may have been reading.

**Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, let us try to get some real clarity on this. Will the finance minister, or whoever speaks for the PMO over there, confirm that the PMO will not interfere again against any future bank merger proposals? Will they confirm today that it will be the finance minister who will deal with it and it will be his decision, not the whim of the Prime Minister?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in fact there are a good number of people who are involved in dealing with any proposed merger should a proposal formally be made. That includes the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. It includes the Commissioner of Competition. It will include committees of the House which will need to examine any such proposal on the basis of the public interest.

I and my colleagues will all have views on whether the interests of the public are best served in any proposal.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ)** Mr. Speaker, on Monday I raised the issue of a Montreal company which has lost a \$40 million contract to export ambulances to Iraq, because of the U.S. position on that country. The minister's response was as follows:

—we are continuing to cooperate with the U.S. authorities to reduce tensions in that region and not give materiel to Iraqis under these circumstances

How can the Minister of Foreign Affairs make such a statement when he knows very well that the sale of humanitarian supplies such as ambulances is in full compliance with the spirit of the United Nations program on trade with Iraq?

**Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct. Exports to Iraq need UN approval because it is the United Nations which issues the export permits. If a UN permit has been issued, Canada approves the export and it takes place. It is a misunderstanding to imply that the American authorities are the ones stopping the export. It is a decision by all of the countries via the United Nations.

\* \* \*

• (1500)

[English]

**PRIVACY COMMISSIONER**

**Mr. Walt Lastewka (St. Catharines, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the privacy commissioner has expressed concerns over the use of data collected from international air travellers with regard to the advance passenger information and passenger name record program.

Could the Minister of National Revenue assure the House that the information collected is used in the best interests of all Canadians?

**Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.):** Yes, Mr. Speaker, an appropriate balance has been achieved between the security needs of Canadians and the civil liberties of Canadians, in Bill S-23, which was the Customs Act.

I know the House would want to know that just hours ago Canada Customs and Revenue Agency officials, along with the RCMP, seized 16 kilograms of heroin with an estimated street value of \$8 million. This was accomplished in large part due to the information that we were able to glean from the API/PNR system. I think it is also a tribute to the excellence of our targeting officers. This clearly demonstrates the importance of having good intelligence.

**GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS**

**Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I might have caught the Minister of Public Works flat-footed yesterday, but is he willing to admit today that a deal cobbled together by his predecessor, Mr. Gagliano, is now under joint investigation by the FBI and the RCMP? Of course I am referring to Canadian military spare parts being housed in Florida in a warehouse owned and under contractual agreement with a Canadian company, a deal cobbled together by his predecessor.

Will the minister now admit that it is under investigation?

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have made inquiries further to yesterday and my department is unaware of any ongoing investigation by either the RCMP or by the FBI with respect to the matter the hon. gentleman refers to.

He has requested that the Auditor General undertake an investigation. I understand the Auditor General is considering that request and will reply in due course, but with respect to any ongoing investigation by police authorities, my department is not aware of any.

\* \* \*

**ETHICS**

**Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, I would like the Prime Minister to listen really carefully to this question, which is directed to him. On June 11, the Prime Minister wrote to the ethics counsellor instructing him to table an annual report by September 30. To date we have not seen a report.

Assuming that the ethics counsellor submitted his report on time, we can only conclude that the Prime Minister is sitting on it. He has something to hide. Is he going to table it in the House today?

**Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am willing to take the question under advisement. I will verify if the document is available and arrange to have it tabled as soon as possible for the benefit of the hon. member asking the question and of course any other hon. member as well.

\* \* \*

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of a group of Canadians of extraordinary talent and accomplishment in the field of the performing arts. They have devoted their energies toward enriching the cultural life of Canada.

[Translation]

They are the recipients of the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards, the most prestigious award given to Canada's performing greats.



[English]

Today we have with us eight of the recipients. They are: Joy Coghill; The Guess Who, that is, Randy Bachman, Burton Cummings, Donnie McDougall, Garry Peterson and Bill Wallace; Phil Nimmons; and the recipient of the Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Voluntarism, Père Fernand Lindsay, whose ancestor, William Burns Lindsay, by the way, was the first Clerk of the House in 1867.

I welcome these people to the House today.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

[Translation]

**The Speaker:** Please note that a reception will be held in Room 216 for the award winners and all hon. members. You are all welcome at this reception, which will start around 3.15 p.m.

[English]

I wish to inform the House that the notice of motion standing in the name of the hon. member for Wetaskiwin has been withdrawn.

**Mr. Greg Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am seeking approval to table the letter that I have from the Auditor General of Canada which puts into question the minister's response in terms of an RCMP-FBI investigation on the deal cobbled together by his predecessor. I would like permission to table that letter so the minister would know for once what is going on in this file. Could I have that approval?

• (1505)

**The Speaker:** Does the House give its consent to the tabling of this letter?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

[Translation]

\* \* \*

[English]

#### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, may I ask the government House leader for an outline of the business for the next week?

[Translation]

**Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, obviously today we are debating an opposition motion, but after these comments, I will have to raise a point of order to obtain a clarification from the Chair.

That said, tomorrow, we will debate Bill S-2. In the event that there is no opposition motion for the rest of the day today, we could resume the take note debate on health care services.

Monday and Wednesday shall be allotted days, as we must have pursuant to the Standing Orders.

On Tuesday, we shall debate the Public Safety Bill that was introduced earlier today. This is Bill C-17, followed by the

#### Points of Order

Citizenship Bill, Bill C-16. I also intend to continue the debate on this bill on Thursday of next week.

Friday, the last day before the Parliamentary break, I intend to put the bill on the Kimberley agreement on the Order Paper.

As regards Wednesday evening of next week, we shall have a debate pursuant to Standing Order 53.1 on the Canadian Coast Guard.

[English]

\* \* \*

#### POINTS OF ORDER

**Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today is an allotted day pursuant to Standing Order 81. Before we move to orders of the day I wish to seek a clarification and to raise an issue with the Chair. Standing Order 81(2) states:

On any day or days appointed for the consideration of any business under the provisions of this Standing Order, that order of business shall have precedence over all other government business in such sitting or sittings.

This would mean that an order called for by the opposition, at least in theory, would be the one that would be discussed by the House. However I heard a few moments ago, as you indicated to the House, that one of the two items, potentially an opposition motion, under this allotted day has now been withdrawn. Pursuant to that I am faced with the issue of rising now before the House on what has been brought to our attention by Mr. Speaker.

What we have now is only one motion left. The proposed motion by the opposition House leader is identical to a recommendation contained in the second report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, concurrence of which was moved this morning in the House.

I wish to remind the Chair that the debate on this and the amendment thereto has not been concluded. It is still before the House and was before we adjourned. Marleau and Montpetit state at page 476, dealing with the rule of anticipation:

—a motion could not anticipate a matter which was standing on the *Order Paper* for further discussion,...

It is submitted that the proposed motion by the opposition House leader does precisely that with regard to the motion for concurrence proposed by the chair of the standing committee. Marleau and Montpetit go on to cite a case—I know someone else will cite it so I thought I would raise it first—when the Speaker had been lenient in applying the rule of anticipation to an opposition motion on an allotted day.

I want to argue, Mr. Speaker, that even if that leniency had been utilized on another occasion that the circumstances were different and do not apply today.

This particular case involved a ruling by Speaker James Jerome on November 14, 1975. An examination of that ruling will show that the opposition day motion was similar in subject matter, only in subject matter not textually the same, to a bill that had received second reading and had been referred to a committee. The two issues were not before the House and certainly not before the House on the same day.

*Points of Order*

The Speaker pointed out at that time that the motion was broader in scope than the bill and it was on the strength of that, that Mr. Speaker allowed, at the time, to supersede the rule of anticipation even though the subject was similar. It was a motion versus a bill and the motion was broader than the bill. It is only because of that, that the rule of anticipation was superseded.

Obviously the Chair has already recognized I am sure, in its usual objectivity, that this case is different. The motion proposed by the opposition House leader is the same in effect, almost word for word as a matter of fact, as the motion already put before the House by the chair of the procedure committee. Both would have the effect of amending the Standing Orders in virtually the same manner.

Since the motion of the opposition House leader would accomplish the same end as the motion already before the House, it should not be proceeded with, Mr. Speaker, because of the rule of anticipation. I draw to the Chair's attention Chapter 12 of Marleau and Montpetit, page 477 in that regard.

• (1510)

Mr. Speaker, you will be left with no other conclusion and will rule that in this particular case what the hon. member across the way has now brought before us as his opposition motion is irreceivable by the Chair.

That being said, and I do not want to be difficult with these matters, if the opposition House leader wants for his opposition day to proceed, I would be willing to give my consent that the motion that has been withdrawn be put back on the order paper so that he does not lose the opposition day that he had sought for himself and his colleagues. I would be prepared to do that in an effort of cooperation. I do not want people to think that the opposition will somehow lose a day here. Far be it for me to propose such a thing today.

Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention page 477 of Marleau and Montpetit where it states:

The Speaker has nonetheless ruled that the opposition prerogative in the use of an allotted day is very broad and ought to be interfered with only on the clearest and most certain procedural grounds.

Footnote 210 on the same page states:

However, the Speaker advised the House that neither the consideration of the opposition motion nor the vote taken on it could prejudice in any way the progress of the bill to which the motion is related.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, a vote on the motion would not affect the disposition of a bill that was already before the House or one of its committees.

What we have here today is quite different. It is unprecedented as is any attempt to invoke that the rule, as established by the jurisprudence of 1975 established by Speaker Jerome, would apply here. I believe that this is different and that the rule of anticipation makes it such that Mr. Speaker cannot put the motion that the official opposition, by way of its House leader, has asked to be considered as the order of the day.

**Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, after listening to the government House leader I find it amazing. The motion to concur has been adjourned; it is now a government order. No decision will be taken

and there is no anticipation. We all know what the outcome is. We have already had a half day's delay on the opposition motion.

**An hon. member:** Great democracy.

**Mr. John Reynolds:** Someone yelled great democracy over there. What a great democracy. Opposition day started five hours ago and we have not gotten to it yet.

• (1515)

From our point of view the motions are different. With respect to my hon. colleague, his argument is not well taken. The motion to concur a report cannot be amended in a way to alter the Standing Order change. An amendment to a concurrence report can only send it back to committee to ask the committee to consider a change. An amendment to the supply motion will affect change if adopted.

We have a clear difference between a supply motion that, if adopted, would change the Standing Orders. The government's amendment to the concurrence report, if adopted, would send the report back to the committee. These are two similar but different items before the House and represent two distinctly different delivery mechanisms for change.

If the amendment to the concurrence motion were defeated or carried, we would still not get a decision of the House on this issue because the motion would then become a government order and would wait until the cabinet decided when to bring the issue forward. In other words, Mr. Speaker, if you do not allow the opposition motion to proceed, you will be putting the opposition's supply motion or its subject matter in the hands and control of the cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw to your attention Speaker Jerome's ruling, which has been the guiding principle that Speakers have been following ever since. He said:

The fact is that the opposition prerogative...is very broad in the use of the allotted day and ought not to be interfered with. It certainly is not the disposition of the Chair to interfere with it except on the clearest and most certain procedural grounds.

The government House leader has failed on all these arguments. The government's procedural ground is one of panic and disarray because of the chaos in that party today. If accepted by the Speaker it will infringe upon the rights of the opposition and redefine, and undo the protection Speaker Jerome provided the opposition with his landmark ruling. This matter of the Alliance supply motions must not be put in the hands of the cabinet where it will surely die.

**Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC):** Mr. Speaker, the government House leader, as usual, has only given us half the facts in relation to this question.

The argument may be made that the proceedings of this morning and the proposed allotted day motion by the Canadian Alliance amount to the same question. The nineteenth edition of Erskine May, at page 368, states:

Matters already decided during the same session.—A motion or an amendment may not be brought forward which is the same, in substance, as a question which has been decided in the affirmative or negative during the current session. The rule may be fully stated as follows:—No question or bill shall be offered in either House that is substantially the same as one on which its judgment has already been expressed in the current session....

Further, on page 369, it states:

A question may be raised again if it has not been definitely decided.

*Points of Order*

The debate this morning was on the motion to concur in a report from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and on an amendment to return the report to the committee. That question is still before the House. It has not been decided by the House. The proposed motion from the Canadian Alliance is a substantive motion on an allotted day.

Citation 923 from the 6th edition of Beauchesne's states:

Motions moved on allotted days may relate to any matter within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada,....

The Opposition prerogative is very broad in the use of the allotted day and ought not to be interfered with except on the clearest and most certain procedural grounds.

It is clear that we have every right to move to the motion as submitted by the Canadian Alliance.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will not get into all the specifics of Marleau and Montpetit, and whether the amendment is voted on or not. What we are dealing with here—

**Some hon. members:** Common sense.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** My colleagues are saying common sense and that is what we are dealing with. We are dealing with basic common sense and democracy. We can skirt around the issue and look for loopholes and technicalities, but by doing so we emphasize even further the serious problem we have here within the House. When we have to rely on those types of meanderings and ways of doing things—

**An hon. member:** Weaseling.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** I will not use the term weaseling. I am trying to be respectful here.

To disallow democracy to take place, something is seriously wrong. I have the utmost respect for your ruling, Mr. Speaker, and I know you can see beyond what is happening here. Yesterday, a notice of motion was given. Whether it was one or two is not the question; a notice of motion was given. In order to finagle around the issue we saw the government come before us this morning to find the loophole to get out of it.

The bottom line is the opposition day motions are looked at as a time where the opposition parties can get out there and force the government into some serious discussion, and force it to finally vote on some issues, ones that it has skirted around forever. I would ask that you give the opposition day motions the right of that broad flexibility and rule in favour.

• (1520)

**Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of things perhaps you could consider in your ruling.

First, we have made changes in the way supply day motions are handled. The government has demanded and received the right to have this motion in advance. It wanted changes and got them. It gets the motion earlier. It gives us less discretion, less flexibility. It already gets it well in advance, as do you, Mr. Speaker, in the Chair.

Once the Speaker rules that the motion is admissible and once it is on the order paper and we come to work here in the morning

anticipating that order of business, it is simply wrong for the government to step in and use its extraordinary power to defer that.

Second, I would refer to the House leader's comments earlier where he said it was improper to deal with a subject matter that was also in a concurrence motion. We are early in this session. A year from now there will be hundreds of reports in this House, none of them for the most part acted on by the government. If the minister over there and the House leader decide that they want to stop an opposition member's attempt to discuss an important matter all they have to do is raise one of hundreds of reports which deal with almost every subject under the sun and stop the opposition from bringing forward important issues for Canadians.

It is an extraordinary power that would allow the House leader to galvanize even further the efforts of that party over there to ensure things are run out of the Prime Minister's Office and those that control the House leader instead of here in the House of Commons where people want to debate issues of importance to all Canadians.

**The Speaker:** First, the Chair wants to thank all hon. members for their assistance on this important issue.

I want to say first that yesterday the government House leader raised a point of order expressing concern at the idea of the Speaker reading, pursuant to Standing Order 81(14)(a), notice of more than one motion to be debated on a designated supply day. I want to make sure the House is aware that I have taken this matter under advisement and will deliver at least advice to the House on that matter, since one has now been withdrawn, at a later date.

With respect to the issue that has been raised with regard to the admissibility of the opposition motion that has been proposed for the supply day today, what is left of it, I draw attention to the ruling of Mr. Speaker Lamoureux on March 6, 1973 where he said:

The Standing Order, as the hon. member said, gives the opposition very wide scope in proposing motions. That is one of the reasons why, since the inception of this particular Standing Order in 1968, not a single opposition motion has ever been ruled out of order. On a number of occasions the Chair expressed doubts as to whether an opposition motion would not bring forward for the consideration of the House a matter on which a decision had already been taken in the course of the then current session. However, in all cases the mover was given the benefit of the doubt.

I must say that a search was done today but we were not able to find a motion that had been ruled out of order. There may have been one or two, but we just have not located any. That assists the Chair in making its ruling today. The fact is it appears that a very wide latitude has always been extended to the opposition in respect of these matters. I am sure that recognition will be extended by the Speaker now and in the future.

The government House leader however made reference to page 477 of Marleau and Montpetit, particularly to the rule of anticipation. I would like to quote a little from page 476 of Marleau and Montpetit in respect of this rule of anticipation. It states:

The moving of a motion was formerly subject to the ancient "rule of anticipation" which is no longer strictly observed. According to this rule, which applied to other proceedings as well as motions, a motion could not anticipate a matter which was standing on the Order Paper for further discussion, whether as a bill or a motion, and which was contained in a more effective form of proceeding.

*Supply*

In other words, if there is a motion, as we now have, standing on the Order Paper to concur in a committee report, the argument that the House leader is advancing, as I understand it, is that this rule of anticipation would prevent another motion that is the same or similar from being moved.

The next paragraph states:

While the rule of anticipation is part of the Standing Orders in the British House of Commons, it has never been so in the Canadian House of Commons. Furthermore, references to attempts made to apply this British rule to Canadian practice are not very conclusive.

In the circumstances, since they are not conclusive, it is difficult for the Chair to accept the argument put forward by the government House leader that the opposition's right to move this motion should somehow be restricted by this rule of anticipation.

It further states:

The rule is dependent on the principle which forbids the same question from being raised twice within the same session. It does not apply, however, to similar or identical motions or bills which appear on the Notice Paper prior to debate. The rule of anticipation becomes operative only when one of two similar motions on the Order Paper is actually proceeded with. For example, two bills similar in substance will be allowed to stand on the Order Paper but only one may be moved and disposed of. If the first bill is withdrawn, the second may be proceeded with.

I could go on. What we are faced with here is a motion to concur in a committee report, the committee report's purport of which is similar to the motion that the opposition proposes to put to the House today. The Chair is being asked to say that because the words of the opposition motion are similar to the words in the committee report, concurrence in which has been moved, I must conclude that the two are therefore the same and the second ought to be ruled out of order or at least inadmissible at this time because of this rule of anticipation.

The Chair is very reluctant to do this because in the Chair's view the opposition has the right to move whatever motion it chooses to on an opposition day. As has been pointed out in argument, to allow the government to argue this would mean that any time there was an awkward opposition motion that the government chose not to want to debate, it could bring in a committee report, then move concurrence and thereby preclude the debate from taking place.

• (1525)

I am sure that was not the intent of the standing order. It certainly was not the intent of the modernization committee when it said that notice had to be given a day in advance which allows this kind of, if I can call it so, game to be played.

Accordingly, I must in my view find that the opposition motion is in order. I say that notwithstanding the very generous offer on the part of the government House leader to allow the one that had been withdrawn to be brought back and reinstated for debate should my ruling be contrary. I recognize his great generosity in this regard, as I am sure do all members of the opposition and for that we are all very grateful.

In the circumstances I find the motion that has been proposed in order and I intend now to put it to the House.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**SUPPLY**

ALLOTTED DAY—ELECTION OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS

**Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance)** moved:

That Standing Order 106 be amended

(a) by replacing section (2) with the following:

“(2) At the commencement of every session and, if necessary, during the course of a session, each standing or special committee shall elect a Chair and two Vice-Chairs, of whom the Chair and one Vice-Chair shall be Members of the government party and one Vice-Chair shall be a Member of the Opposition. In the case of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Chair shall continue to be a Member of the Official Opposition and the Vice-Chairs shall be Members of the government party. In the case of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations, the Co-Chair acting on behalf of the House shall be a Member of the Official Opposition and the Vice-Chairs shall be Members of the government party.”

(b) by inserting the following new section (3):

“(3) When more than one candidate is nominated for the office of Chair or Vice-Chair of a committee, the election shall be conducted by secret ballot as follows:

(a) the clerk of the committee, who shall preside over the election, shall announce the candidates to the committee members present and provide them with ballot papers;

(b) committee members wishing to indicate their choice for Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the committee shall print the first and last name of a candidate on the ballot paper;

(c) committee members shall deposit their completed ballot papers in a box provided for that purpose;

(d) the clerk of the committee shall count the ballots and announce the name of the candidate who has received the majority of votes;

(e) if no candidate has received a majority of votes, a second ballot shall be taken, provided that the candidate with the least number of votes shall be dropped from the second ballot; balloting shall continue in this manner until a candidate receives a majority of votes, at which time the clerk shall destroy the ballots and in no way divulge the number of ballots cast for any candidate.”;

and that the Clerk be authorized to make any required editorial and consequential amendments and that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs conduct a review of this new procedure before a second application takes place.

He said: Mr. Speaker, after five and one-half hours we have had a great victory for democracy in the House. We are going to have a vote on this issue. Every member of the House will have to stand and tell Canadians whether they want a free vote for chairs and vice-chairs of committees. That is all we have been asking for. We did not need five and one-half hours of government filibustering, trying to break and twist the rules. The public can now see that it was all done for naught. There will be a vote. We will not have as long a debate, but there will be a vote.

Before I begin my main remarks I want to thank the New Democratic Party for trading supply days with the Alliance so that the matter of secret ballot elections at the committees can be dealt with before the standing committees organize. I am certain that the NDP would have done this itself, but as a small opposition party it is allowed only one votable opposition motion per year. The official opposition considered this a matter for all private members and not the subject matter for just one opposition party. We were happy to use one of our votable supply day motions to bring this matter to a conclusion.

*Supply*

I would also like to thank the Conservative Party that offered me its day on Monday in case the government did take it off the agenda or try to filibuster it out of the Parliament Buildings of Canada.

We have on the Order Paper a private member's motion, a report from the committee and a supply day motion all dealing with secret ballot elections at committee. The proposals call for a secret ballot election when more than one candidate is proposed for the election of the chairman or vice-chairman. It is similar to the way we elect our Speaker and we have done a good job of that over the last few years.

The reason my party chose to adopt this procedure through a supply day motion is that the current procedural mechanism provided for private members is inadequate. I do not have to go into the details. I know most members are familiar with the shortcomings of our private members' business procedures, thus the reason the procedure and house affairs committee recommended improvements in its 66th report in the last session and tabled the same report in this session.

The other alternative is to adopt a motion at committee and then have it reported to the House, which we have done. However getting the report adopted is a problem. The chief government whip indicated to reporters outside the committee room after the procedure and house affairs committee adopted the new secret ballot procedure that she would use whatever means she had available to her to prevent the report from ever seeing the light of day.

She mentioned a procedure that is mentioned in "Building Trust II". "Building Trust II" is a package of parliamentary reforms sponsored by the Canadian Alliance. I will read the section from "Building Trust II" that deals with committee reports and the procedural manoeuvre the government plans to deploy. The heading is "Empowering Committees—Concurrence in Reports". I will begin with the associated quote from my deputy House leader. She states:

The authority of parliamentary committees stems from the adoption of their reports by the House. It is a little known fact that the government, by simply "talking out" a report for an afternoon, can prevent the report from coming to a vote.

That is what happened this morning.

In these cases the motion to concur in the report becomes a government order and can only thereafter be moved by a cabinet minister. There is no accountability in giving the government the prerogative to move a motion to concur in a report that is critical of the government or requests sensitive documents from the government. It makes no sense and this loophole should be removed.

The Alliance recommendation is simply that:

The standing orders should be amended to provide for motions to concur in committee reports to be put to a vote and not shelved by a simple procedural manoeuvre.

Here is a perfect example of how that loophole can be abused by the government. Here we have a case where the majority of members of a committee agree on a proposal and the government, fearful that a majority of members in the House might also agree, uses a simple manoeuvre to prevent that decision from ever coming to a vote. It is another example of how the executive branch of government enjoys much too much power in the House. That is why it was necessary to use a supply day to move forward on parliamentary reform and circumvent any procedural trickery from the frontbench, much like the five and one-half hours of trickery we have put up with today.

In 1985 the House of Commons adopted the secret ballot procedure to elect its Speaker. It was seen as a necessary step to enhance the independence of the office of the Speaker by taking the choice of the Speaker away from the Prime Minister. In a 1997 report commissioned by the Privy Council Office, C.E.S. Franks, a respected expert in Canadian parliamentary democracy, recommended that committees elect their own chairmen for the same reason.

● (1530)

It has been suggested that because the secret ballot proposal is not included in a package of proposals, we should not proceed with it. The argument is that standing order changes should not be done in a piecemeal way.

I point out that the government House leader, at the beginning of this Parliament, offered one single reform: the reform that impeded members' ability to move amendments at report stage. The government singled out a reform that benefited it and at the same time suggested that private members could not target a few reforms of their own.

I have another example. At one time we could not ask questions of the government related to the orders of the day. It was an inhibiting rule so we eliminated it by unanimous consent. It could be argued that it was a piecemeal reform but it was a worthwhile change and we made it when we had consensus. That is what we did in question period today. We are on this debate. I got to ask a question of the Prime Minister and it was answered by the government House leader. We can now do that. It was a good amendment and we did it piecemeal.

At one time it was unparliamentary to sing O Canada in the House. On a motion by the member for Edmonton North we now sing O Canada every Wednesday. It was not a part of a package but it was a good idea and members ran with it. It is amazing to me that every time I speak outside of the House and I mention that to people they do not believe we only do it once a week. They have a hard time believing we never did it prior to the member for Edmonton North bringing it before the House.

Improving the televising of committees was done independent of other reforms. We have a report from the last session that improves private members' business. Even though it is a single reform idea, it is a good idea that has the support of most if not all members of the House.

There used to be only 20 supply days but since that could not be divided proportionately among the four opposition parties, one was added. The traditional last allotted day was altered to allow for debate on the estimates and a motion. That was a single reform proposal that was adopted as a stand alone item.

We altered the standing orders to take government operations out of one committee and make an additional committee at the request of one government member, which was another stand alone change.

The size of committees gets altered all the time to provide for someone's needs or because it makes sense. Those changes require a standing order change.

### Supply

We will soon be dealing with the problems of the Senate opting out of the Joint Committee on Official Languages. The government is requesting a standing order change to deal with this order, a one time item.

The piecemeal argument is not well taken. It is only an excuse by the executive not to proceed with the change. We should take note of who is objecting and why they are objecting. Why do they object to enhancing the role of the private member, yet they ram through with the use of closure single item reforms that benefit the government and the PMO?

The chief government whip argues that we should always vote openly and be accountable for our vote. Of course we should when we vote on policy and tax issues. What we are talking about here is voting in an election. Just because that election has to be within the walls of Parliament does not mean it has to be an open vote. We elect our Speaker by secret ballot.

The government whip says that the Speaker's position is different. Yes and no. We expect the same independence and fair consideration from the chairman as we would from the Speaker. We expect the Speaker to exclude himself or herself from a caucus but we do not expect the chairman to do the same.

As the hon. member said, there are some differences. Before speakers were elected by secret ballot they did not attend caucus either. Secret ballot is irrelevant for that argument. The junior chair officers probably occupy the chair more often than the Speaker but they also attend caucus and nobody is concerned about that.

The secret ballot issue is much more than just a sensible parliamentary reform. It has come to symbolize the struggle for power between the executive branch, the PMO, the Prime Minister and the private members of the House.

This leads me to something I spoke about earlier. It was a point that was made by C.E.S. Franks, who was commissioned by the Privy Council to report on democratic reforms. Professor Franks made the point that the only way we could proceed on democratic reform would be if a substantial number of government members were to say that they were not going to take it any more and dissent. He said that the last time government members dissented in the name of democracy was when Sir John A. Macdonald was Prime Minister. His government in the first four sessions of the Dominion Parliament was defeated five times on government bills, twice on government resolutions preparatory to bills and twice on resolutions from supply. What is interesting is that only three of the motions on which the government was defeated were moved by an opposition member. Two were moved by so-called supporters of the government. Sir John A. referred to these members as loose fish and shaky fellows.

● (1535)

Party discipline has evolved over the years and is now at a point where prime ministers, such as the late Pierre Trudeau referred to his backbench as nobodies and the current Prime Minister likens them to terra cotta soldiers.

When the motion today comes to a vote I hope all backbenchers in the House will realize how important it is and, no matter what the party discipline, they vote with their conscience. We have heard what

they say outside the House but this is a very important issue for the future of Parliament and how Parliament will work.

There is a need for renewed interest in parliamentary reform. The government's response to the need for parliamentary reform as reflected in the throne speech was disappointing. The task to reform Parliament has been left once again to private members and the opposition.

For example, the 66th report of the procedure and House affairs committee tabled in the last session recommended that all private members' business be votable. The government leadership on the committee resisted making all private members' business votable for nine years. For nine years they made lame excuses not to move forward on this file despite the pressure from within their own caucuses and the actual balloting and surveys we have had in the House where it shows 76% of members want private members' business votable.

I am sure that all private members would agree with me that the government forced private members to follow the Mahatma Gandhi path of policy implementation. Mr. Gandhi once said "first they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight with you and then you win". Well, private members got tired of being ignored. They got tired of being laughed at and they regret that they had to fight so hard for so little respect.

I point out that the Liberals have not won yet because the report has to be adopted by the House. The obstacle that stands in their way is the same obstacle that stands in their way and prevents committees from electing their own chairs. That obstacle is the cabinet and the Prime Minister of Canada.

Since the standing committees will be organizing in the next few weeks and days, the timing for a motion to introduce secret ballot elections at committee is very timely.

Before the introduction of the secret ballot vote in the 19th century, governments attempted to influence the outcome of elections through intimidation, blackmail and bribery. Witnesses of our modern day standing committee elections make the same observations. It is the height of hypocrisy for Canada to send observers to a country like Zimbabwe to oversee its election when in our own Parliament we tolerate undemocratic strong-arming tactics of the 19th century thugs.

At the moment the only election conducted by our secret ballot in Parliament is the one to elect our Speaker. This came about as a result of recommendations of the McGrath committee in the mid-1980s. It is embarrassing that we in the House only began secret ballot elections in the mid-1980s since the secret ballot was first introduced in Canada in British Columbia in the mid-1870s. A lot of good things come from British Columbia.

What most observers of Parliament find shocking is that the election process for the chairmen and vice-chairmen of standing committees in the Canadian House of Commons in the 21st century is not that different than what took place in Canadian elections in the 19th century. In the 19th century secret ballot was considered a radical and controversial proposition. Reformers back then knew that the right to vote without secret ballot was a hollow ritual because it could not be exercised without fear of consequences.

*Supply*

Modern reformers are of the same opinion about the election process here within Parliament with respect to the election of standing committee chairmen and vice-chairmen. For example, consider the last time the Standing Committee on Finance set out to elect a chairman. Word got around that the Prime Minister's choice was going to have some trouble getting elected. The government whip attended the election and her strong-arm tactics became the subject matter of a question of privilege where a number of members who were present at the finance meeting rose in the House and accused the Liberal whip of intimidation.

The legislative council of the state of Victoria, Australia passed the world's first secret ballot law in March 1856. South Australia approved similar legislation just a month later, and it is a smaller and younger country than we are.

British Columbia enacted the Dominion's first secret ballot legislation in 1873. Ontario and the Dominion government followed in 1874, Quebec and Nova Scotia in 1875, and then the other provinces and the territories.

In the publication *The Archivist* from January-February 1989 Volume 16, it describes the Quebec experience from the 1800s. What is frightening is that the description eerily mirrors in many ways the standing committee election experience in this Parliament. It states on page 8 that since the vote was not secret in the 1800s it was possible to threaten voters with reprisals if they did not vote the right way.

● (1540)

The finance committee example I just cited earlier fits the Quebec experience of the 1800s perfectly.

I have another parallel. I refer to pages 8 and 9 of *The Archivist*. It says that the government party, formed of members of a group known as the Chateau Clique, advocated executive power in the hands of the governor and legislative counsel. The opposition, known as the Parti canadien, wanted the parliamentary majority to have control over the executive and over appointment of officials. A number of governors used every tactic possible to have their supporters elected. These included choosing biased returning officers, selecting strategic locations for polling stations in various ridings, and hiring bullies. Since elections did not take place concurrently in neighbouring ridings in the 1880s, a party's bullies could move from riding to riding.

The scenario in Quebec in the 1800s is exactly what is taking place here. The executive branch, and more specifically the Prime Minister's office, is in complete control of Parliament and uses every tactic it can to maintain that control. The description of bullies going from riding to riding reminds me of what the Liberal whip does each fall during the chairmen elections at committee. The chief whip and her deputies move from committee to committee ensuring their members vote the right way.

In Quebec the Parti canadien responded with force and, as a result of its popular support, was able to retain a majority in the assembly. Election violence continued to increase until the outbreak of the rebellion in 1837-38. The 1841 election which followed the suspension of the constitution and the adoption of the Act of Union was no different from earlier elections. Governor Sydenham used

tactics similar to those of his predecessors to ensure that the candidates of his choice were elected. However the reformers fought back and eventually secured adoption of the principle of responsible government.

We have reformers here in the House too. The Canadian Alliance and other parties have been advocating secret ballot elections at committee for some time. I also give some credit to the backbench of the Liberal Party because a number of them have done the same thing. While we will not see violence as we did in the 1800s, we will see a good parliamentary fight if a fight is necessary, and it may be necessary.

In reviewing the reasons why members resisted the secret ballot in the 19th century and the reasons offered today by some members, we find disturbing similarities.

On April 21, 1874, John Cameron spoke in the House and offered his argument against a secret ballot. He said:

Elections cannot be carried without money. Under an open system of voting, you can readily ascertain whether the voter has deceived you. Under vote by ballot, an elector may take your money and vote as he likes without detection.

One hundred and thirty-two years later we discover the same attitude in Parliament. Recently a Liberal member refused to help a veteran who was his constituent because the member discovered that the veteran did not vote for him. Here we have a member in the 21st century immediately acting on information about how a constituent voted and imposing a consequence because the constituent, in his opinion, did not vote the right way.

We forget the injustices the secret ballot helped our democracy overcome. We saw it in the case of the veteran looking for assistance from a member of Parliament and we see it every fall when the standing committees organize.

It is no wonder that in Canadian Houses the secret ballot election is an increasingly popular method of conducting elections as a response to renewed public interest in parliamentary reform.

The issue was first addressed in this House by the Lefebvre committee struck in 1982. The committee noted in its report that:

The Speaker belongs to the House, not to the government or the opposition... Although the Speaker once elected has always become the true representative of the House of Commons, [as he proves so much today] the Prime Minister under our practice has always exercised a very strong influence over the initial of a candidate.

It was a report of a second committee, the McGrath committee of 1985, that led to those changes being adopted in 1986. The result was the first Speaker of the Canadian House, the Hon. John Fraser, a very good friend of mine, being elected by secret ballot in the House.

While this change is a welcomed reform, the Prime Minister still exercises strong influence over the election of the Deputy Speaker, Deputy Chairman of Committees of the Whole, the Assistant Deputy Chairman of Committees of the Whole and every single chairman of the standing committees of the House.

All these positions should be taken out of the hands of the Prime Minister. It has been suggested that the Speaker appoint the junior chair officers. Since he is elected by secret ballot, his choices would enjoy more confidence from the House than the Prime Minister's choices. The Speaker would probably enjoy more loyalty and discipline if he were the one making the choice.

### Supply

I am aware that the secret ballot will reduce the influence of the government leadership. As House leader of the official opposition I, too, will lose influence. It is not just the government who enjoys the predictable outcome of the current process. The official opposition presently enjoys chairing the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations. My party has at least one vice-chairman position on all other standing committees. The loss of personal influence as a leader is not what is at issue here.

• (1545)

Since 1986 we have trusted the House to choose its own Speaker. It is now time that we trust private members to choose their own committee leadership.

In conclusion, the McGrath committee in 1985 studied the confidence convention and it concluded that only explicit motions of confidence or matters central to the government's platform should be treated as confidence. All references to confidence were expunged from the Standing Orders that regulated the function of Parliament.

Despite all these reforms in the past, I implore the backbenchers in the House to look at this motion and vote for it. Let us move forward for democracy in Canada and in this Parliament.

**Mrs. Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga Centre, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to make one comment and then hopefully inspire a bit of dialogue.

First, I would like to put on the record, given that I can challenge the patience of most whips and House leaders, that I have never been intimidated by the current whip or the current House leader, when he was in that role of whip. This is a much exaggerated theory. On our side of the House we are often put in a position where we have things explained to us, and to please and to continue a good rapport we sometimes change our minds. I cannot speak for others but I have never been intimidated by a whip of our party. Members can probably guess from today that I challenge the patience of a lot of people a lot of the time.

My second comment to the official opposition House leader is that we were involved at procedure and House affairs, which I considered to be the most non-partisan committee in the House. This motion has come forward before at that committee. During that time it never really came to the House because it did not get agreement in that committee.

One thing that the mover of the original motion did before it was amended, was to change the second vice-chair from a member of the official opposition to just a member of the opposition. I partially think that was to make the whole opposition feel that it had an opportunity to become vice-chair of some committees. Was it an oversight or was it an intentional modification to be more democratic?

The other thing I would like to ask the House leader of the opposition is this. Is it a big stretch to agree that the chair should be a member of the government, particularly for this round?

This is the last thing I would like to ask him. I have been accused of being rather naive in trusting the opposition to make this work, if

in fact it passes on Monday, because this is an adversarial place. I can remember when I was a high school teacher, we would get an OSR on the kids and would find one who had been jail and who was a big problem. The first time that kid stepped out of line, he or she was nailed and then the kid became a problem in class.

• (1550)

We are at the point in that committee where I trust that members really wants this to work for the next year or the next round. It would be very good if the member could assure the House that I am not naive, that the member has every intention of selecting the best chairs possible and not disrupting, not being adversarial and not purposely choosing chairs who will not work.

**Mr. John Reynolds:** Madam Speaker, the member for Mississauga Centre that she has never challenged my patience in committee. I do not think I have done it to her either.

My experience, in close to 30 years in and out of politics, with the policy and procedures committee is a committee that works for the betterment of Parliament. It tries to be as non-partisan as it can be. That is why we have this motion coming from that committee to the House. It has been debated for years and I have given my argument to the government House leader as to why sometimes piecemeal things have to happen in the House. It is hard to get packages all the time.

Yes, the member's amendment to my original motion to say that we would have to have a government member or two opposition members on the other committees is a bit of a stretch. I really believe in the integrity of members of Parliament to select the best chairman.

The chairman of the environment committee, the hon. member for Davenport, and I may have had great disagreements on how the environment works, but I can think of no better person in the House to be chairman of the environment committee. I would vote for him at any time. That is also true of every other committee.

I sincerely believe the PMO, much like the House leader of the opposition, has power to decide who our chairs will be. They all get paid and there is politics played. The government whip has made it very plain that she will do everything she can to ensure that this does not make the light of day.

This puts it in the hands of those who we all decide should sit on those committees. The government will not lose anything because they will still be chairing the committees. I would hope that at the end of the year the government House leader would see, as the member for Mississauga Centre said, that there will be integrity and no games played.

I know we had jokes when we were in the committee. One of my Liberal colleagues has a good sense of humour. I sometimes have dinner with him every once in a while and we have some good laughs. We were talking and had a list of some people that could be chairs of certain committees who nobody would want and probably would not do a good job because it was not their forte. They should be in another committee. That will not happen in the House. We will not play those kind of games.



The opposition is here to build reform in Parliament that allows Canadians to know that we are here, that we do a job with integrity, that what is good for Canadians and good for all of us.

I would hate to be in the room with the person who called the member for Mississauga Centre naive. It is just not true. She is a very hard-working member of the House who believes in what she is doing as much as I believe in what I am doing.

• (1555)

**Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC):** Madam Speaker, my experiences with committees are similar to the ones mentioned by the opposition House leader.

On the fisheries committee we could not ask for a more independent chair. It is the same thing on the culture and heritage committee. If we had the opportunity to vote for chairpersons, we would have no problem voting for the two people who currently fill those roles.

It is our hope, as we get into the new committees, that similar chairs will be there. These are the people for whom we will vote. These are the people we will elect, simply because as opposition members we want to ensure that issues are dealt with in a fair and non-partisan way.

Why then does the House leader think that the government will want to appoint the chairs in caucus? I have seen chairs that have been put into positions to obstruct rather than to ensure that the work goes on. I would like his views on that point.

**Mr. John Reynolds:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague, the House leader for the Conservative Party. I could not agree with him more.

We only have to look at the work done in the last Parliament by the environment committee, chaired by a person I do not always agree with, but an expert on his side of the environment issue. I think he had a little over 300 and some amendments in that committee. The committee worked extremely hard to put together amendments to a bill that was drastically flawed.

However, when the bill came back at report stage, only 120 of those amendments were left. The government saw fit to change them. We know why the government wants to control these things.

In reality, it should be parliamentarians that work with the government. The government brings in legislation, but until we get to the stage where members of Parliament cannot vote against that legislation without the fear of defeating their government or embarrassing it, what is the purpose of legislation? The minister takes it back and rejigs it with his bureaucrats to the way the majority of members of Parliament want it and that becomes the law of Canada.

The Charlottetown accord is a great example. We would have had a Constitution that the majority of Canadians did not want. We had a referendum so we do not have it. This is a similar thing. Let us select chairmen by secret ballot. Let us have committees that work better and we will all be better off in the House of Commons.

**Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, we heard a lot of talk today about democracy and

### *Supply*

democratic reform. On the topic of democracy, does the hon. opposition House leader believe that it is democratic and respectful to members to establish a protocol committee to scrutinize all public comments of caucus members? A short time ago the Canadian Alliance created such a protocol committee to scrutinize all the public comments of its members to ensure they did not contradict party policy.

In the light of the discussion today, how does the member consider that to be a democratic example from his party?

**Mr. John Reynolds:** Madam Speaker, that is debate. We get the clippings every morning to see what they say and what our people say to ensure that we are on target, as the government does. That is part of the democracy. We do not hold people back in this party from saying what they would like to say, which should be pretty obvious to a deputy House leader.

It is nice to be the one party in the House that has a strong, young, vibrant and bilingual leader who is gaining popularity in Canada and does not have anybody stabbing him in the back, has a caucus that is 100% behind him and is moving forward. The other parties are at least conducting leadership campaigns in some sort of semblance of order and with respect.

The Liberal Party is in chaos. It cannot seem to get its legislation straightened out for the House or keep its members under control. It is a party that has prided itself and been elected probably 75% of the time because it has kept everything together. However it is showing signs of weakening and that is really sad for democracy in Canada. My party is open, free, democratic and it prides ourselves in the way it conducts business.

• (1600)

**Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate this afternoon. I listened attentively to most of the speech of the hon. member, apart from a couple of minutes when one has to do what one has to do. Otherwise I listened to as much of the speech as I could. I have had time to review the notes that I wanted to use today, but upon reflection and upon listening to the hon. member's speech, I thought I would do away with those and simply react to a number of things he has raised and otherwise inject some views.

The first day we came back here after the recess, it was made clear to us that the opposition was going to have what it called in its words, a work slowdown. The initial reason for the work slowdown by the opposition was that those members did not like, according to them, the then solicitor general and they wanted his resignation as a precondition to not having the slowdown. The then solicitor general, for reasons that had absolutely nothing to do with that, but in defending his honour, decided to withdraw from the cabinet.

*Supply*

Then the opposition members decided they needed a new target for a work slowdown. What I am saying here has occurred and I have seen every single step of it. The next target of the work slowdown was not to elect committee chairs until they could start up this issue, and they did.

**An hon. member:** It is about time.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** An hon. member says it is about time that they created chaos around here, at the same time as they are invoking parliamentary reform and pretending before Canadians that what they want is modernization when all they had in mind was the creation of chaos, but I will get to that a little later.

**Mr. Brian Pallister:** And reprimanding your own members.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** I am not reprimanding anyone on my side of the House, bien au contraire. I will get to that in a little while and I hope the hon. member will listen attentively.

I am not too worried about consistency when debating the Alliance members. Their party is the one which not too long ago wanted to take some people whose profiles they did not agree with and put them at the back of the store. It is the same party that chastised its own members and put them at the back of the House. It is the same party that turfed people out of their critic roles and all kinds of other things when they made statements they did not like. So I will take the remonstrances from the people across the way with a grain of salt.

Let me get to what was said a while ago about Canada's record as a liberal democracy. We can have our debates inside the House and disagree with one another all we like, but to pretend that this is akin somehow to our not being the liberal democracy that we are, the international observers that we are, the international defenders of peace that we are and have been, is simply wrong.

It says all kinds of wrong things about the people who work for Elections Canada, with which I do not agree. It says all kinds of wrong things about our peacekeepers, about Canadians working as volunteers offshore trying to install parliamentary democracies and other liberal democracies elsewhere in the world.

I for one am very proud of what they have done, and I am very confident about every effort they have made, such as representing Canada in Zimbabwe. We have been chastised for that by the House leader for the official opposition, which is wrong. None of us on this side of the House, regardless of how we agree or disagree with the motion that is before us, would agree with the premise raised by the hon. member that our international election observers cannot defend Canada as a result of a dispute on how to elect committee chairs. That is simply ridiculous.

This is internal cuisine that we have here. That is what it is. We will solve it and that is fine, but we should at least put it for what it is and not start saying that Canada somehow misses its international role as a result of a dispute two sword lengths across the way for our electing committee chairs.

● (1605)

There was an indication a while ago about how we did modernization and how all of us live by the modernization rules that we have set in place.

We put in place a modernization rule whereby members on all sides of the House could know a day ahead of time what the subject would be. What did the opposition do yesterday, those same people in favour of modernization? They put forward two motions so that we would not know which one they really wanted to move today. Next week perhaps there will be 10, and the week after the entire phone book so we will not know what the topic will be. They are completely going around the modernization rule which they themselves said they are in favour of. Let us remember what is going on here before we believe everything we are told by the other side of the House.

I want to talk about the parallels that have been drawn with the Canada Elections Act. I am the minister responsible for the Canada Elections Act. I put forward Bill C-2 to modernize our election laws, to put rules on third parties and to do all those things so that there would not be some of this grey money, shall I call it, that was entering the political process and so that we could not have these campaigns artificially defeating some of our people in the House. There was the no more prime ministers from Quebec campaign which some of us saw not that long ago. Do we remember those campaigns? Do we remember how they got there?

We remember all those things. We put forward Bill C-2 to plug up those loopholes. Which party voted against it? Do we remember which party was against Bill C-2, which party was against those transparency rules? It was the Alliance Party. Do opposition members think I have forgotten or that any other member on this side of the House will soon forget?

After we put that in place, the National Citizens' Coalition protested. Of course the National Citizens' Coalition is not national and it is not a citizens' coalition or anything close to it. Anyway, that organization decided it would launch a court action against me and the government for having passed that. Then it brought the government to the Supreme Court against having transparency rules. Does everyone know who was the leader of the National Citizens' Coalition when it did that?

**An hon. member:** Tell us.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** An hon. member has invited me to tell the House. It was in fact the member who is now the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the same party invoking that transparency and democracy before us today.

**An hon. member:** That was for more freedom.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** That was for more freedom, we hear, the freedom to hide money from the Canadian taxpayers, the freedom to use money that comes from everywhere, including possibly offshore, in order to defeat candidates. The money is utilized by international organizations against gun control and whatever else in order to defeat people. And that is the advocate of democracy? I for one do not believe that very much.

The House leader of the official opposition talked about the excellent chairmanship of the hon. member for Davenport. I agree with him that he is an excellent chairman. The hon. member perhaps does not know this but the hon. member for Davenport and I have been friends for a long time. The person who tries to make anything else but friends between the hon. member for Davenport and me has not been born yet.

He said that the member for Davenport was elected by secret ballot. Yes, but how did we have that secret ballot? By unanimous consent of that committee in order to have the secret ballot. The committee had that kind of confidence in the hon. member.

What is proposed before us today? Leave aside whether or not we should change the standing order at all. If I happen to err, I want to err in favour of greater transparency as opposed to greater secrecy, but that is a personal choice. Perhaps we are not there yet.

Let us leave that aside for a minute and look at that standing order. Even if the committee, according to this proposed standing order change in the opposition motion, unanimously agreed to have a transparent public vote, it could not do so. That is the standing order we are asked to change.

•(1610)

I asked that the standing order go back to committee for two weeks, not 10 years, to have it corrected. At least if we pass such a standing order, it should be drafted properly. Hon. members across the way who say they are in favour of modernization are against having the rule drafted properly. They do not want it to go back to committee for two weeks.

How many people in the House actually know that the motion does not only create a secret ballot, but it also alters the system of electing committee chairs by way of a motion which we have had from time immemorial? Should we not discuss this in our respective caucuses, have it brought to committee and make a decision there before we implement it?

What about the issue of consent? If parliamentarians on a committee decided by majority or otherwise to have a public vote, they would be prevented from doing so. Is that what we want? I am not sure. I am not sure that we have had enough time to debate this, consider it and alter it in order to have a final decision on it. There is more.

We have changed standing orders by a number of ways in the House of Commons. I have changed enough of them with my colleagues from all other parties. I think they remember how it is done. It has been done by unanimous consent in large measure. Ninety-nine per cent of standing order changes have been made by unanimous consent. Members on each side of the House would look at the change and if they felt the change was good and right, it was proceeded with.

That is not the case here. Regardless of how this ends, if unamended and written exactly the way it is, there will be a quantity of hon. members who will not agree with this change. And it will be a permanent change.

Whereas in the few cases where there have been standing order changes that did not form part of a consent or a broad consensus, and

### *Supply*

where they were imposed, and there have been very few of them, they at least had an expiry date on them. After one year they lapsed unless they were re-enacted. There is no such clause in the proposed change. If this does not work, there is not even a mechanism to change it. It is not even built in.

Why are hon. members across the way who say they are in favour of modernization against sending it to a parliamentary committee?

[*Translation*]

The hon. member opposite may plead all he wants for provisions to have bills lapse, as if he did not know the difference. We are talking about the rules governing this House.

Finally, I would like to address this issue and the parallel that some draw with the fact that our constituents elect us by secret ballot, using that as a justification for us to do the same in parliamentary committees. I think the reality is the opposite.

Naturally, the people who elect us have a right to do so in privacy because this is a decision all Canadians make according to their conscience: to elect those who are to represent them in this great institution. I have been here for a very long time, in one capacity or another: since October 25, 1966.

Some of the jobs I have held have been less prestigious than others. Nevertheless, I have come to respect this place and the people who send us here. How does hiding to vote after having been elected improve transparency and accountability? I do not understand.

As I said earlier, this will remain a personal choice. If a committee decides otherwise, by a majority vote for instance, it may do so even if I disagree. But it is a different story entirely to say that a committee is to act this way all the time, even if members unanimously decide otherwise and want everyone to see how they vote. They would no longer be allowed to under the proposal made today.

This is not well thought out. This issue needs to be referred back to a parliamentary committee. We must ask parliamentarians to fully reconsider the issue. If we have to go ahead with this approach, we will, although I may disagree, but at least it will be done in a structured and reasonable fashion, with deadlines, given that this is not an amendment to the Standing Orders requiring a consensus of this House.

I say to my counterparts—I treat them as my counterparts, they are the opposition critics, they are not ministers—, that is the House leaders on the other side, that they ought to think a little about what they are creating if they act in this manner. If we create the precedent of being able, through a simply majority of the House, to change rules that do not please the vast majority of parliamentarians in this House, those who may one day be on the side of the majority might do the same to those on the side of the minority.

As a person who has great respect for this House, I say that this is not the way to go about changing the rules. This, in fact, would create a system with a greater level of adversity, and the tyranny of the majority could increase in such a system. This would not be good for the institution that I am called, as Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, to defend.

*Supply*

Yes, I am the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. Of course, I want to ensure that my colleagues on this side of the House are well served and that the government's agenda moves forward. But I also consider that I have a responsibility, in the British sense of the term, as Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, toward all my colleagues.

I do not think there is one single colleague in this House, from either side of the House, who has called me or contacted me during my holidays or at some other time and whom I did not personally call back. I have always done so. I firmly believe that I have this duty toward all parliamentarians in this House, whether on this side or the other side. Those who have been here for a long time know that this is what I am referring to. So I ask them particularly to think about this seriously.

What I have asked the committee is for two weeks to draft this procedure correctly. If we still decide to do things this way in future, perhaps it will be adopted. It will be for parliamentarians to decide.

•(1615)

But in the meantime, it is not right to adopt something that is poorly drafted, that is almost impossible to change, that is done in a manner that reduces transparency, that seeks to get tough with a government that wants to move ahead with its legislative agenda, by electing committee chairs to make committees work. This is not the proper way to do things.

I do not think that what I am telling hon. members is unreasonable. I am asking them to think about this. Yes, I am now a government member. I even sit on the front benches because I am a minister. But that was not always the case. I spent time on the back benches and even more time on the other side of the House. I intend to be here for a very long time. I hope to be on this side of the House for a long time, but it is possible that, some day, I will sit across the floor. I hope it will not be soon, but many years from now.

In any case, whether I sit on this side or on the other side of the House, this institution remains a great institution and we must abide by its rules. To the extent possible, the rules that we adopt should be the result of a consensus. We do not want 51% of the members supporting the rules that govern us, with 49% opposing them. It is improper to adopt rules in this fashion, not to mention the fact that it would be almost impossible to change them.

This is the plea that I am making to parliamentarians today. This is what I am asking this House to adopt. This is what my colleagues asked this morning, when they proposed to adopt the report and refer it to the committee for review.

I am prepared to cooperate with the other House leaders and with parliamentarians, to adopt whatever they want after a review by that committee and, of course, the establishment of a modernization committee.

There is a committee that changed 26 of our rules. I have proposed a change and it was decided, by all of the leaders, to have a first debate on modernization in the week following the November recess. So, we will have a debate in the very near future.

The government's intention is clear and my intention is clear. The Prime Minister alluded to it. I have been talking about it for a long

time. In fact, this was included in the conclusions of the old report. So, we all know what we intend to do: to move forward on this issue. This is what we have done. We have already changed several rules and I am not opposed to changing and improving other ones. But I think that adopting now what is before us would be very detrimental to this great institution.

•(1620)

[*English*]

**Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, it was interesting listening to the House leader's passionate rant or argument, whatever we want to call it. Toward the end, he said that the motion was not worded properly, that it was not in the right governmentese and that it was just a heinous piece of legislation. His argument was that it was not worded properly.

However, less than an hour ago he stood in that same place and made the argument to the Speaker and to our House leader that the motion too closely resembled a government concurrence motion and that the wording was too exact and so on.

How can he say one thing now and another thing an hour ago?

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has been in the House for some time and, frankly, for someone who has, I am a little perplexed that he would not know that in fact the motion to refer an issue back to committee, which is what the concurrence motion and the amendment thereto does, is to send it back to committee for improvement, which is exactly what I am saying now.

He is saying that the opposition motion is the same as the motion that I think should be sent back to committee because it needs improvement. Of course that is what I am saying. Why does he think I asked that it be sent back to committee for improvement? It is because both of them, that are worded virtually the same, are not properly worded. That is not an inconsistency.

If the hon. member does not understand that after having been here, after all, for a little while, the books are on the table to explain parliamentary procedure.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I do not intend to be long because I will be the next speaker after the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

I would like him to indicate to us which words are inappropriate in the 42 line motion before us. Can he tell us which words are a problem?

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Madam Speaker, I will say that, personally, I find the whole motion excessive. That being said, should we adopt that motion, I can see, at first glance, three elements that I think are not worded properly.

First, when such an amendment is proposed on which there is no consensus, and this is the case here, there is usually some sort of expiry date, like a year or so, after which the rule no longer stands. That is the first element. It has been done several times in the past. The member is certainly aware of that.

*Supply*

The second element of particular concern to me—and if this is referred to a parliamentary committee for a few more weeks, there will certainly be other improvements to be made—is the proposal to change the voting procedure. In committee, the vote is taken on a motion: “I move that Mr. so-and-so be appointed chairman”. People vote in favour or against the motion. This voting procedure is being changed, but to what extent were parliamentarians consulted on such a change? I am not convinced that most members are aware of this.

The third element is as follows: there would have to be a secret ballot even if the committee members all agree to vote by a show of hands. I do not think that is what the committee intended to do. Let me ask those who want secret ballots—and I am not one of them—would it not be desirable to have the majority agree to have secret ballots, whether that means two thirds of the members or all of them, it does not matter, as long as there is some flexibility? As it stands, there would be a secret ballot even if that was the opposite of what all the committee members wanted.

Have we thought about that? Is that what we want to do? Would it not be wiser to refer this proposal back to the committee for 15 days, as I suggested, in order to review it and go over the rules and see how we can change things, if that is what we want, and then bring it back to the House with an expiration date after one year. We would implement it and, if we do not like it, we would send it back again.

Since this morning, I have come up with these three elements. I am sure other parliamentarians who are familiar with this issue will want to examine it. I have not sat on a committee for some years now, because I am a minister and before that I was the whip. However, I want those who sit on a committee to know that a structure is being set up. Are we quite sure this is the structure we want? I do not think so.

• (1625)

[*English*]

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Madam Speaker, following along the same lines, what the problem was with the motion, I cannot help but think that it was not a matter of what the problem was with the wording of the motion. It was simply a matter of the government not liking the motion.

In our efforts to be respectful of the integrity, the intelligence and the commitment of all members of Parliament, I am somewhat annoyed that my colleague would suggest that those committee members really did not know what they were doing, that they really did not know they wanted a secret ballot, that they really did not know they wanted a change in the procedure of the vote, and that they really did not know there was no expiry date mentioned.

Each and every member in the House has a fairly good idea of those things. The committee certainly had a very good idea of those particular issues. It is somewhat annoying, offensive and disrespectful of all of us as parliamentarians to suggest that we do not know and that we have spent this entire day speaking so passionately to something so important.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Madam Speaker, I apologize if the hon. member is offended. I do not know if she sits on that committee or not. If she is offended, I am sorry for that. The purpose is certainly not to insult members, either personally or collectively, who sit on that committee. That is not the point and I think I have explained it to

all hon. members. The point is that should we have rule changes when they do not form the broad consensus of this House, at the very least we should arrange them in a way such that they are not permanent. Those have been part of our longstanding conventions.

I am sure that if the hon. member sits on that committee she knows that. Actually, whether she sits on the committee or not, being the well reasoned and well versed person that she is I am sure she already knows that. Given that the knowledge was already there on the part of the hon. member, I do not see how she can possibly be insulted. I am advancing to her reasonable thoughts in looking at this thing, I believe, and if they are not reasonable, in 15 days the committee will tell us that too. I do not think they are wrong.

The hon. member said that every single member who voted for this knew that from here on in that every single election of committee chairs would always be in secret even if 100% of members wanted otherwise. Maybe. I am sure there are some members who do not sit on the committee who do not know that. Did every single member of the committee know that? If she does sit on that committee, maybe she knows that.

Nonetheless, I invite members to think about what is being proposed, about the business of changing the method of election that has been there from time immemorial, of voting on a motion for the one of putting the names seriatim. Is it better? It is a drastic change and is certainly one that I think comes at us very quickly.

I dealt with the modernization committee with the hon. member's colleague, someone who has been around here even longer than I have. We did hours and hours of work on these things. We adopted rules. We made some of them temporary where we were unsure, those permanent when they formed a broad consensus, all of these things. We did it several times. I know that is how we did them. We did them often enough so that I can remember. That is what I am inviting the member and others to think about. I am in no way trying to insult her skills or her ability, or those of anyone else, to do these things.

• (1630)

**Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC):** Madam Speaker, I want to put a question to the minister regarding some action that was taken by the government and this House in 1985 when for the first time we elected the Speaker of the House. As we well know, prior to that the Speaker, he or she, was appointed by the Prime Minister. In fact, Mr. Trudeau, whom I often agreed with, disagreed with the idea of a secret ballot in the election of the Speaker, but I have to say that it has been very good for Parliament and good for this House.

I know that the member has built his career on demonizing Prime Minister Mulroney who actually brought forward that idea, but would he not have to at least admit that it has been good for Parliament and good for the country? What would be wrong with doing that at the committee level where so many of his members completely agree with those of us on this side of the House on this issue?

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Madam Speaker, I am glad the hon. member brought up the McGrath committee report. He says this issue is analogous to the McGrath committee report and that is essentially one case that I was raising to buttress my argument.

*Supply*

The first McGrath committee report was one that the entire House agreed with. It was passed by consensus. What we are dealing with today is something on which, to the best of my knowledge, roughly half the House is on one side and half on the other. That is why making that kind of a change on the strength of the majority plus one or some such, whatever the precise number is, and then proceeding with it as a permanent rule change would be wrong. So in fact, the hon. member invoked a case where the McGrath committee report was formed on the consensus of not only all parties in the committee unanimously when it reported, but then of the House itself. Interestingly, the second McGrath report was done differently. The hon. member was perhaps a member at the time when the second McGrath report was adopted, when the government at the time cherry-picked from the report the amendments that it liked, adopted them over the wishes of the opposition, and I was sitting in the opposition, and did only them. I thought that was wrong.

**Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, I say this sincerely because I have always held this member in high regard and great respect. I hope he takes the time to watch the video of his speech today and observe the string of internal contradictions.

He talks about wanting to have this thing extended for 15 days so the committee can study it and get it right, yet how often has he been in charge of invoking closure in the House when exactly what we have tried to do, by promotion of debate and exchange of thoughts, is to try to improve a bill?

Another contradiction was in terms of democracy. It is bizarre that a member of the House should stand up and say: I am going to help promote democracy by making sure that the people that the Prime Minister appoints are elected by the members of the committee. That is just the opposite of democracy. It is a contradiction.

It would be much more honest on the part of the government if it is going to continue with the way it is right now to simply appoint the chairs and be done with it. It is a facade to say that here is the appointee and then force the members of the committee to vote in favour of that appointee as a way of putting up a facade of democracy for it. I have much more to say but I know my time is up.

•(1635)

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Madam Speaker, I am sure the hon. member who is advocating reviewing the video of what was said will want to review the video of what he said, because the last statement he made about me, I have never made. Perhaps he will want to review that and then correct the record, but I am not holding my breath.

On the other item, the thought of somehow equating this with closure of debate is debasing the currency and is most unfortunate. The House will know that the closure rules, the time allocation rules, are in the Standing Orders. I am not inventing parliamentary law. They are there. Just as the opposition has a right to delay legislation, the government has a right to bring it back up to speed once it has been delayed. That is the fact. Everyone knows that. Any independent observer of our institution will know that.

The British house has in its rule that every bill is time allocated to the end of the day when it is debated. It is debated that day and when the house shuts down at night, they vote on it and it is finished. Every bill is time allocated to one day. We do not have that rule here. We debate and when the opposition delays it too much, or the

government runs out of patience, or there are time imperatives and we must have the bill or other such things, then the process is advanced by way of a democratic vote held by members in the House. That is not synonymous with what he is advocating and surely he knows the difference.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos):** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre, Income Tax Act.

**Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île-d'Orléans, BQ):** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in this debate on the motion put forward by the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Valley. I take this opportunity to congratulate him on the 30th anniversary of his being elected to this place; he was first elected in 1972. I should be pointed out however that these were not years of continuous service in the House. I think that following the 1972 election, he served in the British Columbia legislature, as Speaker and also as the Minister of the Environment.

I want to commend him and his party on this motion before the House today. The premise of the motion has more to do with how the concept of democracy might be defined.

I listened earlier to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons deliver a speech full of pathos. This is a rare occurrence. As we know, the government House leader is basically a good and honest man; no one will question that. I think that, in his capacity as parliamentary leader, he ought to seek consensus and ensure that the work of the House can be done. In his speech, the hon. leader called our attention to the concept of democracy. He referred to democracy repeatedly.

A French poet and parliamentarian, Lamartine, said about democracy that universal suffrage is democracy itself. People who are listening to us and who do not follow our debates regularly do not know how things are done in parliamentary committee.

The Quebec National Assembly also has parliamentary committees similar to those that we have here. Committees study bills or other issues that they want to put on their agenda. They have the power to hear witnesses and to adopt amendments to bills that are referred to them by the House. A committee is more or less a miniature version of the House of Commons. We have 20 or 22 committees. Those who are listening to us are not always able to see the work that is done in committee.

I will confess that when the members of the Bloc Québécois were first elected in 1993 and formed the official opposition, we asked ourselves whether we should, as a sovereignist party, take part in these parliamentary committees. They are controlled by the government in terms of the number of members.

*Supply*

The Bloc Québécois has no problem with the fact that the government majority has a majority of seats on committees. This is why people elect a government; it is perfectly normal. This is why the members opposite are sitting on the government side and this is why the Prime Minister has the privilege of appointing ministers; it is one of his prerogatives. The fact that the election is won by a particular party is not questioned. However, on the issue of appointing a chair or vice-chair, we must look at the way it is done.

•(1640)

For the benefit of those listening, I will explain how it works. I was on the Standing Committee on Transport for eight years. Now I sit on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which counts among its responsibilities the approval of the striking of committees and the composition of all committees. This is part of our prerogatives, as set out in the Standing Orders. As the Leader of the Government in the House has said, the way it operates is that the chairs and vice chairs are designated by a motion duly voted upon by a show of hands, and whether the votes are recorded or not is a mere technicality.

This process leaves many citizens disenchanted with politics and mistrustful of politicians, because on numerous occasions the government does not behave like a government in a democracy but rather like an oligarchy, a monarchy with all the power in the hands of a prime minister. Then there are all those henchmen, all those apparatchiks gravitating around the Prime Minister, the office of the Prime Minister, what the media refers to as the PMO. When the PMO speaks, the columns of the temple quake.

The Prime Minister's henchmen literally blackmail the members and also terrorize, to some extent, ministers. On occasion, a minister might have a differing opinion. However, once he receives a visit or a phone call from someone in the PMO, he had better hang on to his hat, and hang on tight, because he has incurred the wrath of the PMO. This power is centralized in the hands of a few people. They have all the power. A small circle of people have all of the power, including the power to appoint the chairs of the standing committees.

Here is how it works. It begins when a committee is struck. Take for example, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. There are eight Liberal members and seven opposition members; three from the official opposition; two from our party, the Bloc Québécois; and one from the NDP and one from the PC party.

The chair is appointed by the Prime Minister's Office and this is confirmed by a motion. A Liberal member moves that the member for Scarborough, to give an example, serve as chair of the committee. This motion is seconded by a member of the Liberal majority. At that moment, all of the Liberal majority members, like trained seals spinning a ball on their nose, comply fully with the directive that has been given.

The motion is moved by a Liberal member and seconded by another Liberal member. The vote is held and the eight members from the government majority vote for that person. The seven opposition members might believe that another member from the Liberal majority would make a better chair. If the vote were not held by a show of hands as prescribed by the henchmen in the PMO, members from the Liberal majority might even announce their own

candidacy or propose another one of their colleagues besides the one chosen by the PMO.

So, the vote is held. The eight Liberal members vote one way, the seven opposition members vote another way and it is a done deal. This takes place 20 or 22 times, as many times as there are committees.

That is how things are done right now. I know that you cannot say it, Madam Speaker, but I see that you are nodding in agreement. You seem to agree with what I am saying. I know that deep down you agree with me. I understand that, as acting speaker, you have to remain neutral and that, although you agree with me, you cannot say so.

•(1645)

We now have before the House an opposition motion brought forward by the Canadian Alliance. That is the issue now before us. The motion says in the third paragraph that "the election shall be conducted by secret ballot."

That would be quite different from what we have now, where a motion is moved by a Liberal member, seconded by another Liberal member, then the vote is held by a show of hands where eight members vote one way and seven vote the other way. Now, if the election were to be held by secret ballot, it would make a difference.

It says later in the motion that the clerk provides ballot papers to the members present. So there is a framework. Within committees, the clerk has the same role as the Clerk of the House, Mr. Corbett. I consider the committee clerk as the guardian, the holder of the rules of operation of committees. He acts as the consultant or the counsellor, our reference on the Standing Orders.

So the clerk distributes ballot papers. I presume that security measures have been taken. The clerk will have put his initials on the back of the ballot paper. If 15 members are to vote within the committee, the 15 ballot papers would probably not be numbered, but they would have the same format, and so on. The role of the clerk is thus to ensure the integrity of the election process. The best evidence of this is that, before appointing a chair, who is now appointed through what I would call a sham election, it is the committee clerk who presides over the election. No one is questioning their work.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all the clerks of our standing committees. Personally, as a parliamentarian, and I am sure that my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and members on both sides of the House agree with me on this, I think that we do not have enough opportunities to congratulate and thank them for the quality work they do and the advice they give us in committee. Again, nobody is questioning their integrity.

So members will receive a ballot. Paragraph (b) says, and I quote:

committee members wishing to indicate their choice for Chairman... of the committee shall print the first and last name of a candidate on the ballot paper;

Paragraph (c) says:

committee members shall deposit their completed ballot papers in a box provided for that purpose;

*Supply*

Finally, paragraph (e) says that if no candidate has received a majority of votes in the first ballot, the candidate with the least number of votes will be eliminated and a second ballot will be taken.

Does the procedure proposed by the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast to elect chairs of standing committees not remind you of a similar procedure? I am referring to the procedure used by those who voted for us. This is the procedure that they used when they decided to choose us as their democratically elected representatives.

Do members agree with me that, in each of our ridings, the election is held by secret ballot? Do they agree that voters receive a ballot and vote by making a mark beside the name of the candidate of their choice? Prior to the introduction of printed ballots, voters wrote the first and last name of the candidate of their choice. Do members agree that voters deposit their ballot in a box provided for that purpose?

•(1650)

Do members agree that sworn election officers, returning officers, work under the chief electoral officer, who is responsible for managing democracy? Do members realize how striking and disquieting the analogy is compared to our own election?

I do not know what was with the government House leader when he got all emotional and told the House “I have always returned phone calls from members, even during the weekend or when I was on holiday”. We do not doubt that, but that is not the issue.

The issue is that members on this side of the House and many on the other side, from the Liberal majority, have decided to support this motion in order to send the following message: “We are sick of the current system which is controlled by the Prime Minister and his office; we want to get rid of it. We are tired of being a laughing stock, of being considered inanimate objects, trained dogs or seals. We want some respect. We want to have a say in who will be chairing our standing committee”.

A group of members decided to take a stand. They can hold all the special caucus meetings they want, like the one the Prime Minister called this morning at 9.00 a.m., which was supposed to finish at 10.00 a.m., but which finished later. I am happy to see that Liberal members decided to say, “I have been here for  $x$  years—it has nothing to do with being here for 2, 15, or 20 years—and I am sorry.” As one of my teachers used to say, “Henceforth, it will not be the same as from now on.” From now on, things will not proceed as they have for far too long.

A parliament has to evolve. It has to reflect the people it represents. It has to reflect society, which evolves. For years, the Speaker of this House was appointed by the Prime Minister. During the first years of the Mulroney government, it was decided that the person who would chair the work of the House would be elected, rather than appointed by the Prime Minister. I think that it is in the government's interest to seriously consider changing the way that committee chairs are appointed or elected.

Two days ago, on CPAC, the parliamentary channel, and yesterday at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I stated that I wanted to emphasize the courage shown by the hon. member for Mississauga Centre. She is a woman of principle, a

woman who stands up for what she believes in, a woman of her word, and a woman who will not cave in to threat, intimidation or harassment. I commend her. I am not suggesting that she supports sovereignty as I do, but I know very well that the hon. member respects me as a person.

•(1655)

This is why I must tell this House that she has taken a position based on her ideas. I even commented to her “I wonder if you will continue with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs”. She told me, and she also said this publicly, that, if she were sidelined and gagged, she would resign. That is what we call showing courage and having principles.

I wanted to emphasize that. I am convinced that many other members feel the same way as the hon. member for Mississauga Centre.

[English]

**Mr. Reed Elley (Nanaimo—Cowichan, Canadian Alliance):** Madam Speaker, I rise with a heaviness and sadness in my heart. Once again the government members of the House, with the exception of one very brave soul, have added to the democratic deficit of the country. They talk about democracy but then they only use its tools to destroy the last vestiges of it within our midst. I wonder how those government members can truly go home tonight and look their spouse in the eye and say, “I'm really proud of what I have done in the House of Commons today”.

Today we had an opportunity to put words into actions. A lot of words are spoken in the Chamber and on the Hill but I do not think Canadians are particularly interested in words. They want to see actions.

This week the procedures and House affairs committee voted to have secret ballots in order to select the chair of each standing committee. I do not know this for sure, but it certainly seems like it, that because the Prime Minister opposes the idea he has strong-armed his caucus once again to take the action that it took today in the House.

I believe there was a time when the people of Canada felt that when they voted and sent their duly elected member of Parliament to Ottawa they were participating in a democratic process. In turn, the members of Parliament would act on their behalf and represent their needs in this hallowed Chamber.

As we all know, the term democracy takes its roots from the ancient Greeks in which it was the rule of the majority, a government by the people. Note that this definition states “majority” and the plural form of people, not the singular autocratic rule that we currently find vested in the Prime Minister's Office here in this place. Because of that, Canadian federal politics, I would venture to say and suggest, is not currently representative of democracy in action.

I do not fully blame the current Prime Minister for the problem. Unfortunately what we are witnessed to is the culmination of years of erosion to our Canadian democratic system. Yet all the while it certainly was the training ground for our current Prime Minister who was tutored under this very same crumbling system.



*Supply*

I have served as a member of Parliament for almost six years. Although this is short in terms of a lifetime, it is long enough I believe to have some understanding of the problems inherent in our system of government. I do not presume to have all the answers but it is important to be able to identify the problems.

Why do I think the current state of our democracy is of great concern for us as Canadians? It is clear that this nation, vast in geography and different in regions, is a very difficult country to govern. The regional differences which have developed over a period of time, from Quebec separatism to western alienation, have been reflected in the outcome of elections since 1993. These problems, which have spawned the development of new political movements and parties, continue to be perpetuated through inequalities in our electoral system. At a surface level, these are seen in Senate representation, first past the post election results, power concentrated in the Prime Minister's Office and the lack of any real power for members of Parliament regardless of which side of the House of Commons they sit on.

● (1700)

If these problems continue over a period of time, I quite frankly fear for our democracy and the continuation of the nation we call Canada. Canada is not a country that came into being as the result of the armed rebellion of its citizens, such as what occurred of course with our neighbour to the south. However I am increasingly hearing from ordinary Canadians who are very discouraged, sometimes outraged and often fed up with the way that our federal government treats them. Mostly they tell me that they simply feel that they are not being heard.

I want to first address the issue of the lack of regional representation in our parliamentary democracy. If different regions of the country are to feel that they are part of the Confederation, their voices must be heard. Our system is a mix of representation by population and constitutional agreements.

The fact that this system has not been changed significantly since the entry of provinces into Confederation starting in 1867 shows how desperately we need to modernize our democracy. It simply is not fair by any stretch of the imagination that the province of Prince Edward Island, for instance, with approximately 135,000 people, has 4 members of Parliament, while the province of British Columbia, with 3.9 million people, has 34. Using the P.E.I. ratio, B.C. should have 115 MPs. There is no question that the province in which I live is underrepresented in the House of Commons. Nor should one province, as in the case of Quebec at the time of Confederation, be guaranteed a certain number of seats even if its population decreases.

Many Canadians decry, for instance, the ineffectiveness of our Senate. It could, with considerable reforms, become the second level of the federal government, giving the regions a greater say in the running of our country. From a western point of view, it would go a long way to fixing the imbalance which we all feel. It would help the west to truly and finally get what we are looking for, echoing the cry of the years that the west wants in. If it does not happen soon, there will be further discouragement and discontent and a search for quite different solutions to the problem.

I want to say categorically that I am proud to be a Canadian. I do not want us to divide into regions that have no alternative at some

point in our history but to simply go their own way. There is no question that the democratic deficit in our country today will push us into the hands of the Americans faster than anything as these regions would look for strong partners to give them help with their economies, defence and a whole host of things.

However, and I say this with as much force as I can, this is exactly what I fear will happen if we do not take seriously the need to reform our governmental institutions and bring us back together as a country again.

● (1705)

As I have said before, let us remember that after 135 years of being a democracy, we have had very little substantive reform of our governing systems. The committee system in the House of Commons is a case in point. It is based on the premise that the majority party should always enjoy the last word on everything. Since opposition parties have no choice in the matter, we end up electing chairpersons only from the governing party who determine the agenda for each meeting. An example of this: in the last parliament, when I was vice-chair of the health committee, we could never get the government members to agree to allow us to study the problems of our deteriorating health care system. It was my choice as a new member of Parliament to sit on that committee. I felt that there were some truly difficult issues that we were facing in our health care system, that there were systemic problems that needed to be addressed and that we had been elected to come to this place to talk about the huge issues facing us as a country. I was extremely disappointed when we could never discuss this very basic issue on that committee. Instead, the minister of health of the day would give us make work projects to keep us busy so that we could not talk about the real issues. I wonder who it was?

Very seldom do members of the opposition parties have any real input into the final decisions of committees. We are usually forced to submit minority reports on issues because we feel that our voices are truly not heard. How wonderful it would be if the governing Liberals would share that kind of power with us. It would cut down on the endless wrangling that goes on at committees and the petty politics that are played on all sides, of which we saw evidence in the House today, and maybe, and I think Canadians are looking to us for this, we could come up with a synthesis of the best ideas representative of all the people across the nation.

The role of the private member to initiate legislation has been greatly diminished in the past number of years. Very seldom do good ideas from ordinary backbenchers ever receive approval from the House of Commons. The hon. minister across the way is laughing as if she has not been present in the House and on the Hill to know that happens all the time, and it is part of the frustration of her own backbenchers.

### Supply

Why does that happen? Again, it is because the government majority simply and usually shoots it down. If the government does not want it, if it is not part of its plan for the country, it simply will not fly. That means that at any given time it is quite possible for a very good idea, which should become law and is perhaps even backed by the majority of the general population, will never see the light of day simply because the government does not want it to happen. Something is wrong here if this is a representative democracy.

We now have a committee agreement, at least I think we do, mainly because of the pressure from our party to have all private members' bills and motions votable. I hope cabinet will see fit to follow through with the wishes of that particular committee report. Previously, MPs might have been successful in getting this issue raised in the House but it would never have been voted on. We are making some progress but it is painfully slow.

What needs to happen now, in my opinion, if we are going to empower voters between elections and even at election time to somehow get back into being interested about our governing systems is this. We can see from the last two or three elections that the interest of Canadians in our governing system is simply diminishing.

• (1710)

Almost 40% of Canadians opted out of the democratic process in the last election and stopped voting. That is not good enough. It points to the problems that we have in this House and in this country about a growing democratic deficit. I fear for the future of our democracy.

If Canadians were to continue to opt out of our political process the government of the day would fill the vacuum by taking onto itself more power. I do not care which party is in power, if we continue the way we are going that is what will happen. It is a fine line we walk and we can easily step over into an out-and-out dictatorship in this country. However, all of us must be determined to get more involved and to take back the political power which is rightfully ours. I hope that it will take place before it is too late.

We had the opportunity to do exactly that in a small incremental way today. Those of us who wanted to use the democratic means at our disposal to further the cause of democracy among us, are once again frustrated about this process. We fear that the good intentions of the committee on procedure and House affairs, in passing the motion about electing chairs of committees by secret ballot, will never, ever see the light of day.

The government will continue to roll over the rights and the freedoms of members of Parliament and individual Canadians, an action that will continue to foster despair and hopelessness, and division in this country, the country that I love and respect. At the end of the day the question that plagues me is this: Is it truly possible for us to take back our democracy before it is too late?

• (1715)

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's remarks and he has given voice and credence to many of the concerns that have been expressed today. Many of the concerns that Canadians feel right now

are about the dysfunctional atmosphere that seems to have evolved in Parliament. Today was perhaps a dark day for this place.

It was certainly a dark day for members of the government, some of whom embraced this idea of throwing back the blinds and allowing individual members of Parliament to be greater participants in the process, particularly the committee process. The committee process is where much of the non-partisan heavy slugging and sledding of this place is done on important pieces of legislation, on issues that involve participation by Canadians who can come forward as witnesses. We are seeing that now with the finance committee that is travelling.

An independently elected chair, at least independent in the sense that the government or the Prime Minister's Office would not hand pick that person, would demystify and give greater credibility to the process. What we are talking about is not the election of opposition members to fill those important positions of chair, but government members.

Rather than have the PMO choose that person, we are saying to let the majority Liberals, coupled with the opposition, have a hand in who that person should be at the committee level. It would make those committees function better. It would provide for a greater deal of credibility of the chair. It would do away with the perception and the reality that the person is serving at the pleasure of the Prime Minister, as we know the ethics counsellor is, for example.

The hon. member has touched upon a number of important points. We hear the commentary coming from the government side and from the former finance minister. He speaks of the democratic deficit of which we can all agree. There is a growing democratic deficit. I would suggest there is a growing credibility deficit on the part of the former finance minister and on the part of members who say publicly that they want to see greater participation, greater relevance, and greater democracy working in this place. They have a made in Parliament opportunity to stand up and support that by voting for the adoption of the report, for the opposition motion which mirrors the intent of the report of the standing committee.

Is it not high time that Canadians were given a demonstration rather than the rhetoric and non-credible remarks that we have heard today from the government side? Is it not time that Canadians were given an opportunity to see this place work in a positive fashion? Would the hon. member not agree with that?

**Mr. Reed Elley:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from the Progressive Conservative Party for his remarks and question.

It is a dangerous thing for those of us who are in leadership to be presenting ourselves as reform minded members of Parliament in public and raise the expectation level of Canadians that there are some of us who want to modernize and reform this institution if we are not willing at the end of the day to walk the talk.

*Supply*

Canadians are not ignorant. They are intelligent people who can see past phoniness. Indeed, if there are people among us who are aspiring to the highest positions of leadership in our nation, people who are hoping to some day become the Prime Minister of the nation, and if somehow they are raising expectations in public about reform of this place and are not prepared to deliver, then at the end of the day this will continue to create despair and lack of hope in our nation. It is simply not right. As members of Parliament we have an obligation to be prepared to put our words into action.

• (1720)

**Mrs. Carolyn Parrish (Mississauga Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on what I heard from both of the last two speakers.

First, there are members on this side of the House that are willing to vote for the motion on Monday, but I caution you that the rhetoric that I am hearing this afternoon—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. With the greatest of respect to any member on either side of the House, I would encourage you strongly to make all your interventions through the Chair and not directly across the floor.

**Mrs. Carolyn Parrish:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry. I do not speak in the House very often so I have to be brought to task once in a while.

Listening to the debate makes me nervous because I hear people referring to the former finance minister and his concepts. I hear them sinking down into this partisanship that seems to be something we are trying to work our way through. The people on the government side who choose to vote for the motion are giving up a lot more than the opposition. There is no question. It is harder for them and when everything is reinterpreted as a potential leadership race it hardens attitudes on this side.

I would caution people on the opposite side to keep the discussion on the positive merits of selecting chairs based on merit and service on a committee rather than degenerate into one of putting up or shutting up, or is it a leadership race or whatever. Heaven forbid that the opposition would lose my vote on this on Monday but I do not enjoy listening to this.

I would encourage everyone to demonstrate that this will be a wonderful experiment. It will be non-partisan because the opposition is not going to continue taking shots at this side of the House.

**Mr. Reed Elley:** Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the hon. member that I agree completely with you and if you felt that our remarks were—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. Again, in this instance it might be somewhat casual, maybe even friendly, but believe me sometimes our debates get a little bit more animated and so it is always good to maintain the usual long standing practice of making all our interventions through the Chair.

**Mr. Reed Elley:** Mr. Speaker, there was no intent on my part to, in any way, cast aspersions on any particular candidate for the prime ministership of this country, whether it be from my party or any other political party.

We are at a time in our history when almost all of our political parties are going through changes in leadership. I would hold my

own leader to the same standards as I would hold the members opposite in terms of their leadership candidates. The Progressive Conservative Party and New Democratic Party are going through the same kind of process.

It affords us a wonderful opportunity for members of all parties, who truly want to see House reform, to take advantage of the moment in our history to come together to see that it takes place. We may not have that kind of opportunity again for a number of years.

I want to work fully with my hon. colleague who has just spoken and continue to work together to see that these things happen. They must happen for the sake of the country over and above any kind of political party or aspirations that we have in that regard.

• (1725)

**Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe that if you were to seek it you would find consent for the following motion. I move:

That at the conclusion of the present debate on the opposition motion, all questions necessary to dispose of this motion be deemed put, a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 5, 2002, at 3 p.m.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster have unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by thanking my colleague from Mississauga for reminding us to continue this debate in a non-partisan manner. We often, in the spirit of things and with the best of intentions, get carried away. I thank her for reminding us that what we want to see here is real change to the parliamentary system, and hopefully that will happen.

I want to make a few things clear for the public who may be listening because I think there is a misrepresentation or maybe a misunderstanding as to how committees works. Also there is possibly a misunderstanding being portrayed that the opposition wants to somehow take away controls and power from the government unnecessarily, power that the Liberal Party was been given because it was elected to lead the country. Nobody is arguing that point.

One of my colleagues from the governing side commented today that we were partisan. My colleague went on to say that the people had elected the government, they knew who the Prime Minister was and they knew they would do partisan things. Yes, that is so. Each and every one of us gets elected with the party that we represent, but those electors elect us on specific issues as well, knowing that we will come here and represent them. There are some party policies and things that come into play, but the voters not only elect us as that party but also elect us to represent what they want to see.

### Supply

I believe that everybody in Canada wants to see democracy in action. They want to see good programs and policies for the people of Canada. They do not want to see a situation where every member of Parliament, on every issue, whether it is the colour we wear, the way we tie our shoes, whether we will here today and there tomorrow, is controlled by the party or, on the government side, by the Prime Minister. It is very disappointing to think that the member who made those comments would suggest that there has to be control over everything a member does.

We do not have mind melds when we join our parties. We do not agree on everything. We have some differences. We try to balance party policy with actions that we take on certain issues. There are issues on which I agree with the Liberals. There are issues on which I agree in some cases with Conservative members, or the Bloc members or even, shocking as it may be—

**Miss Deborah Grey:** Not that, Bev. Heavenly days, girl.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** Okay, I cannot go that far.

The point I want to make is that there are a number of things we all agree on and we vote in the House unanimously on those issues, but we do not have a mind meld on every issue.

When we are at committee we want to bring the perspective of the people of Canada and the people who appear as witnesses. We want to hear what they have to say and put that in the context of the legislation with which we are dealing. Hopefully among all of us, as representatives of the people of Canada, we will come up with good legislation.

The government does not lose control or power by not having the chair. Even if the government does not have the chair of the committee, it does not lose the power over that legislation. There are eight Liberal members on the committee, three from the official opposition, two from the Bloc, one from the New Democrats and one from the Progressive Conservative Party. The Liberals still have the majority on the committee. They still have control over what is will be agreed on in the final legislation. On top of that, that comes back to the House and the whole governing party gets to vote. It is beyond me why the government would make such a big deal over the issue of electing the chairs.

● (1730)

The other thing suggested by the government House leader was this. What if all the committee members do not want a secret ballot? I get the impression that most people around here want a secret ballot, but the key is what if they do not want a secret ballot. That is fine.

It was suggested that it needs to be public. After hearing that this afternoon, it suddenly hit me that we usually vote on those committee chairs at an in camera meeting and that part is not made public anyway. It is only among us. It is among friends. What is the problem? We do not run out and say that this one did this or this one did that. If we do, usually it is because people have shared what they have done anyway and it is not a big deal.

The issue of electing the chairs should not be a big deal unless, as many of us have said today, the Prime Minister loses that plum that he uses to control members on the other side. That is not democracy.

That is not what is best for the committees, it is not what is best for Parliament and it is not what is best for Canadians. I hope that we can go beyond this.

I am actually quite surprised today that we were into so much discussion and manoeuvring and with such slickness. I am really surprised to see all this happening over electing the chairs of committees. It is almost scary. It is Halloween, but that is not why it is scary. It makes me wonder why on earth the Liberal members are making such a big deal about this. I do not know why the government, as a whole, would be afraid of this.

We are choosing from two Liberals. No one is suggesting that the chair should not be a Liberal, although it would be great if that person was not necessarily a Liberal. The eight Liberals on that committee are not appointed by the opposition. They are chosen by the Liberals. Then out of those eight, they choose who will be the chair. All we are asking for is the opportunity to vote between two Liberals. They all will be on the committee anyway. It is strange.

I also heard the suggestion that it is somehow undemocratic to force people to have a secret ballot. I have to ask my colleague across the way who said that today to please take it back. It did not do the member any favours. That is the type of argument I would expect from a dictator in another country. To hear it from a democratically elected member of Parliament is unacceptable. That is really looking for an issue.

In debate today on another issue I mentioned another of the arguments the government had used as to why we could not have elected chairs, and that was that somehow the government would lose the opportunity to be democratic and fair to the genders in the country. After all, for nine years under this Prime Minister, the government has had the opportunity, if it thought gender parity was an issue on the committees, to deal with that. What was the committee structure before prorogation? There were 21 committees, with 17 men chairing.

I am not getting into the issue of whether it is good or bad or whether we should have gender parity. I am talking about the government's argument that we cannot have elected chairs because we will not have gender parity, somehow suggesting that it has been the saviour in gender parity, probably of women in Canada, when there has not been gender parity. It was another instance of where it was really digging deep to find some reason why we could not have elected chairs.

● (1735)

The other issue was regional representation. Again there are 12 from Ontario and the others are picked here and there along the way. It is not a good argument.

If that is the best the Liberals could do, they did not do it very well. The Canadian public will see that it has not been done very well and it will wonder why this is such a big deal. Maybe the Prime Minister needs that little plum of the extra money a committee chair makes. With that he can promise so-and-so to that committee chair if the chair does what he says and helps him keep people in line. That could be the only reason because I cannot see another one. It will not affect the government's ability to govern.

*Supply*

I hope that the government will see the light and that it will not be just the backbenchers who support this. I hope all government members recognize that this is not a big issue in the whole scheme of things. Let us do what is right for democracy and for parliament. Let us vote in favour of this because it is the right thing to do. We will still have our eight government members appointed to the committee. One of the eight, and I am not sure how it will be done, will be the chair. The government will not lose out on anything and it will still have a majority on the committee.

There is another thing I want to bring forward. I want to let people know about my very first experience with a committee when I came to Parliament in 1997. It was the transportation committee. Discussions were going back and forth at the committee meeting and one Liberal member who was not necessarily agreeing with the Liberal side of things. That was pretty apparent, even for me who was new to the job. One day we were to vote on an issue. When I walked into the meeting, seven of the eight Liberal members were new. Imagine my surprise. That change lasted only long enough for the vote. Then they scurried out of there and the original ones came back in again.

I have been able to figure out different ways of doing things and manoeuvring to get some important issues on the table. It is important for people to know that the opposition, with this motion, is not suggesting that we want to overthrow the right of the government. That will not happen. We support a democratic approach and we want to see things improved in Parliament.

**Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I listen with a lot of interest to the member for Churchill and agree totally. If I might be so bold as to suggest the answer to the question she threw out as to why the reluctance to agree to a secret ballot. I take the member from Mississauga seriously. She has been very brave in her own party on this issue. However it boils down to control by the Prime Minister. It is as simple as that. He is a control freak. I am not using that word disrespectfully. It is a word that is commonly used. However total control is what most prime ministers seek in Parliament, even the prime minister that I represented when I was on the government side.

What I see happening, and I may be off base on this and offend the members opposite, is that the Prime Minister resembles Richard Nixon in his dying days in office when his finger was on the red button willing to push it if he had to get some attention. The red button this Prime Minister has his finger on is his constitutional right to call an election. I am sure if he has used that threat over his own members on this very issue. Most of them would not want to talk about that. However this fact remains, and I am saying this as a Progressive Conservative.

The Prime Minister could call an election today and say "four more years". With the leadership debates taking place, with the leadership runs in at least a couple of parties over here, and maybe more, and with a split vote in opposition across the country, knowing full well that he got elected with 40% of the vote the last time, he probably would form a government. His arch rival, the former finance minister, would be on the outside, which would therefore force every one of those people to support him on this when it came to a vote on the floor of the House.

I expect the government will win this and the secret ballot will be off the agenda. The Prime Minister in this case will get his way. He will bully his way through it with the idea that his finger is on the button. The button is a snap election call.

• (1740)

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** Mr. Speaker, I have to say that even I did not expect that the Prime Minister would resort to that on this issue. I am not going to try to question whether or not he would. That would really be the far side of things.

**An hon. member:** Too cynical.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** I have to admit it is cynical. Even I have not got to that point. Even after seeing the seven move in and out at the committee meeting, I still have not reached that point. I certainly have not had any indication of that.

As I said, what I would like to see is for this to be supported unanimously in the House, simply because it is beyond me that this should be such a huge issue. I do not see it as an infringement on the government's right to govern. Ultimately it would be best for Parliament. I hope that is the direction we take.

**Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in congratulating my colleague from Churchill, I wanted to advance an idea. Wrapped up in all of this debate about the election of the committee chairs is at the heart of it the democratic deficit which a lot of members have talked about this afternoon.

Frankly we make it far too easy for the media to cover politics in a very partisan fashion. There is the high angle shot which highlights, maybe even exaggerates, the neutral zone between the government side and the opposition side. Somehow the average Canadian thinks that is what goes on here: partisan shots across the bow during question period; who has the great retort and who is going to make the national news.

I would like my colleague's comment on this. I believe that if we had committees that were more open, more accountable and which did more different things, the media would be forced to cover those committees in a way that they are not being covered now. It just might help to give democracy a better name. Then more Canadians would say that it was more than just a bunch of people hurling insults back and forth at one another, acting like kids in kindergarten.

Would my colleague agree that a little more autonomy at committees would make it a whole lot more interesting for parliamentarians and for Canadians in general?

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** Mr. Speaker, there is no question about it. For whatever reason that it happens, there is no question that that portrayal is out there, the stuff that gets out of hand. Today we got a tremendous amount of media attention because we have been bantering with each other.

I know there is good work that happens at committee. A great rapport has built up among many of us within the House from all parties, governing and opposition aside. For that matter, I will throw in that even the odd time I agree with the Alliance at committee.

*Supply*

It would ultimately improve the whole process. The majority of members of Parliament genuinely care. They genuinely put their best foot forward and try to do what is best for the country. What happens is that the systems and processes we have in place work against people trying to do that job. They really do work against us.

We need to broaden the scope of what the committees can do. They need to be given that autonomy. Again it is not something that will ultimately infringe on the government's ability to govern. It will not do that. I would certainly agree that if the committees are given more autonomy, if more of that information gets out there, if the public sees them working together, it ultimately will be beneficial.

● (1745)

**Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I just wonder if the member is concerned about the fact that all of this is in limbo. We are fighting petty battles that should never be fought because we agree on the procedure, the same procedure as the government is suggesting but wants to manipulate to make sure that it controls the individuals placed in the positions of chairs. While all of this is happening, the business of the country is being held up.

A number of bills that will affect business in the country are waiting to be addressed by the committees. Right now businesses cannot move forward in developing the concerns they want to get involved in and get the necessary funding because they really do not know what the legislation covering said business will be like.

I just wonder if the member has a concern that while the government is fiddling, Rome is burning.

**Mrs. Bev Desjarlais:** Mr. Speaker, there is no question as we are in this debate and disagreement over how the committee chairs should be elected that a lot of important business is being made secondary.

One thing a number of us have acknowledged is that a lot of the legislation has been reintroduced. It is legislation we were working with before. We really have not seen a whole lot of new legislation before us. Today the public safety legislation was introduced and there are some changes to it. I look forward to the discussions in the House and in committee on the public safety legislation.

Yes, there is work that has to be done. It would be great to have this settled once and for all and then we could get on with it.

**Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough. Many of our members want to speak and I will keep my remarks very short.

The member for St. John's West made a comment concerning the business of the country. It is really a shame that we have to go through this debate on what we would consider the most democratic issue to come before these committees in a long time, that is, the secret ballot to choose committee chairmen.

I agree with many of the members who spoke before me that it has nothing to do with party politics. Many of us on this side of the House recognize the good work done in the majority of committees by government members who are the chairs. We are not talking about opposition members suddenly becoming committee chairmen. That point has been emphasized in the House all day. It has nothing to do with who wins that secret ballot.

On many occasions opposition members are going to vote for a government member to be the committee chairman because some of them have really mastered the art of running a committee and they are very good at it. We have acknowledged that.

Basically it comes down to the principle of whether we are going to democratize this institution called Parliament. In the last number of years we have often used a phrase around this place, but there is a democratic deficit here in Parliament and this is one example of it.

The question is, why is the Prime Minister so reluctant to allow the chairman of a committee to be elected by secret ballot? I go back to some of the interventions we have heard earlier this day. It simply comes back to the Prime Minister wanting absolute control over Parliament.

We do have the rules of Parliament that allow me to get up and disagree with the Prime Minister. In fact most of us on this side of the House get up on a routine basis and disagree with the Prime Minister. It comes down to some of the other things that he or future prime ministers can do and they are very reluctant to give up anything.

Mr. Speaker, I think we came to this place at the same time, the difference being of course that you have survived more elections than I have. We came to this place in 1988, just after the McGrath commission. You will remember, Mr. Speaker, the person who was sitting in the chair where you are today was the first Speaker ever elected by secret ballot in the House.

Believe it or not, successive prime ministers had rejected the notion of an elected Speaker of the House of Commons, which is quite bizarre when we think about it. In fact, the Prime Minister of the day, Mr. Mulroney, rejected the idea when he first came to Parliament. It was almost two years after being here that he agreed that we should do it.

To be very honest, aside from the recommendations of the McGrath committee I think one of the reasons we moved to that is the Prime Minister and his government got into some difficulty with the Speaker that had been chosen by the Prime Minister in 1984. It was a convenient way to move it over to a secret ballot in the House. Mr. Fraser became our first elected Speaker, the Speaker who was here when you, Mr. Speaker, and I were sworn in and the first Speaker that you rose in the House to speak to.

That was a raging debate at the time. I know a prime minister that every one of us in the House has a lot of respect for, regardless of what side we sit on, was former Prime Minister Trudeau. He was absolutely against any suggestion of an elected Speaker.

● (1750)

The question that I would throw out to our colleagues is, has that hurt Parliament or has it helped Parliament in the functioning of Parliament and the debate back and forth in the House? I would say that it has helped Parliament.

*Supply*

There is a sense of independence that you as Speaker now can exercise knowing full well that you have the collective support of the House. I think it gives more authority to you as the Speaker and to your other colleagues who sit in that chair on a day to day basis. In a sense, they are not threatened by the Prime Minister in terms of that position.

I would use that same argument when it comes to committees. The committees in this place do good work. Unfortunately a lot of that good work is shelved because it does not fit in with the government's agenda. Sometimes committees are accused of doing busy work. I can remember this from our early days here. Committees sometimes in the past were accused of being organized in such a fashion that they kept backbench members of the government party busy so there would never be an idle member of Parliament. We have seen some of that as well, but there is no question, and there are members surrounding me as I speak, that members have been on committees that have done exceptionally good work. We have seen many examples of that in this place.

I think we should take a completely serious look at this. I think the Prime Minister should take a second look. I am a little concerned about the state of mind of the Prime Minister. I am quite serious when I say this, and I do not say it disrespectfully, but all of the same signs were displayed in the personality of Richard Nixon in the dying days of his administration. I know that sounds cold and cruel, but I do not think he is functioning as capably as he did a couple of years ago. The Prime Minister is under tremendous pressure. This can be seen and is carried out on the faces and the expressions of the members opposite. There is a great deal of tension that his own colleagues are under. There is certainly division on the other side of the House in terms of what should happen, secret ballot or no secret ballot, power in the Prime Minister's Office or power to the elected members.

We come down for the principle of democracy. We are elected to the House to do our best and represent the people who put us here, to the best of our ability. Most of us on any given day fall down three or four times, but the truth is the majority of us do our best day in and day out.

I think one of the best things we could do for this place is to address that idea of a democratic deficit head on. We must take it on and show the Canadian people that we are willing to do something about it. I would hope that the Prime Minister would be in agreement with us. It is never too late to change one's mind. I guess eventually this will be coming to a vote on the floor of the House of Commons and I would hate to think that the government members would be, as we say, whipped into doing what the Prime Minister wants them to do.

Let us hope that it can change and that it will change, and at the end of the day we will be beneficiaries of a system that truly reflects the will of the Chamber.

• (1755)

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was wondering whether the hon. member would like to expand somewhat on one point he made earlier. Given that we will finally be voting on this issue in the House of Commons, and given that, in recent months at least, the former minister of finance, the member for

LaSalle—Émard, would like people to believe that he is an outspoken champion of parliamentary reform and democratic reform, and in fact he uses the phrase democratic deficit in almost every speech that he gives, does the hon. member think that the former minister of finance will attend next week's vote? Does the hon. member think that the former minister of finance will put his money where his mouth is and stand up and vote in favour of this opposition day motion? What does he think the consequences might be if that were to happen?

**Mr. Greg Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, my guess is that the former minister of finance will behave in the same way he did when the Bloc motion was up for a vote on Tuesday evening. Basically he completely ignored everything he has ever said about the democratic deficit and actually voted with the government.

My belief is that he probably will show up for the vote and most likely will vote with the government. I think the threat of an election call by the Prime Minister is there. If that did happen, and again we would never want to admit that we are probably not in as strong a position as the government at this particular time in terms of public support, but the fact is the Prime Minister probably would win another election. The former minister of finance would be sitting on the outside for another four or five years, so I think that is the threat the Prime Minister is holding over him.

**Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I also agree with the member that the Prime Minister is not what he used to be. He seems to be appalled by what some of his members are doing. He is not operating in the manly fashion in which he used to. He is certainly not the rock solid member that we have seen in the past. We see more cops around him outside than usual. He undoubtedly has some concerns on his shoulders, especially when he looks over his shoulders.

I am reminded of the movie *A Few Good Men*. One way to avoid having the country really see what some of the issues are, one way to avoid dealing with some of the real issues, is to have committee chairs who stifle any real issues that come forth. Good, solid, independent people and good, solid independent Liberals deal with issues as they are presented to committees. People who are put there to stifle debate and stifle issues coming forth do so on the orders of the Prime Minister. What he is trying to do is to avoid the truth. We remember Jack Nicholson saying to Tom Cruise "The truth? You can't handle the truth." We are wondering if that is what is wrong with the Prime Minister. Perhaps the member would comment on that.

• (1800)

**Mr. Greg Thompson:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know where to begin. There is no question that the Prime Minister is under a lot of pressure and under a lot of strain. I guess there is a time to arrive and a time to leave. I think that some of his own caucus members are suggesting that he should in fact do that.

But again, we in this place have a way of getting off the topic. I am not saying that the member is because I am probably more guilty of that than he is. The fact is that we are talking about a ground level of democracy in this place, democracy in its basic sense in this place. The question really would be, why would the Prime Minister object to it? It again comes back to total control. I think it is simply that: total control by the Prime Minister.

*Supply*

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased in some ways to take part in this debate and share the time with my colleague from New Brunswick Southwest.

Clearly what has been discussed I think many Canadians would deem to be somewhat of a insider baseball type of debate as to how committees are structured and how chairmanships are arrived at. Yet what is most significant about the debate still comes back to fundamental principles of democracy, issues that I think are very basic to many Canadians, and perhaps the larger issue of how Parliament is functioning or not functioning in a way that serves its constituents, which are clearly the people of Canada, the people who elect each and every member of Parliament in this place.

Mr. Speaker, you chaired a very important committee, a modernization committee that bears your name, the Kilger report. Within that report is some of the same pith and substance that has been the formation of this debate, that has been banded about here today. Coupled with that and the rhetoric that often accompanies these types of debates, the partisanship and the toing and froing, I believe that at the very least we have exposed and shed light on some of these important issues that need to be discussed. Clearly the commentary by my colleagues and others does bear some repetition. There is almost a Nixonian feel to what has been taking place in recent years.

One of the oldest maxims in justice talks about delay being the deadliest form of denial. What is happening here is very much about delay. What we have seen is the hon. member for Mississauga Centre who had the courage to stand up and vote against her government, which is a rarity in the past nine and a half years, and much of what she said was true. We can lose sight of the bigger issue here. The bigger issue here is that all members, I would suggest, want to see a better functioning Parliament. All members want to participate in an institution that they can be proud of, an institution that they feel is representative of the very ideals of democracy and those principles that we hold so dear. Yet what has been happening in recent days and in the last 24 hours is that we have seen once again the iron hand of the Prime Minister and his office intervening in the direction in which this issue was headed, and that was to make Parliament function better by virtue of having committees elect their chairs, by greater participation in that process, I would suggest.

I hasten to add, and I am glad my colleague from Fredericton is present, that were this process to go through as recommended by the report and as recommended by the motion before the House, many of the same chairs would remain in place. Many of the chairs who are currently serving those posts are doing so competently and admirably. They are doing good work and that work would be recognized by the existing or new membership of these committees.

I say that about the member opposite who chairs the justice committee. I suggest, and I have told him, I would support him in that post. I want to back up that point by saying that what is going to happen if we adopt this motion, if we adopt this report, is that Liberals, the governing party, will still hold the chairmanship of each and every committee in the House. It is not as if they are forfeiting power to the opposition. What they are forfeiting, I would suggest, is some control over that process. That process is still subject to

manipulation. It is still subject to attempts, at least, to have those hand-picked individuals in place. Remuneration is there, and I am not disagreeing with that, but it is still seen as a reward. It is still much of the carrot and stick approach that is brought to play by the Prime Minister. That is simply something that has to change.

We have to be prepared to put some faith in the common sense, the inner fortitude and the strength of members of Parliament to exercise discretion. I suggest that the cracks in the foundation of this place would not open and the Parliament buildings themselves, these great buildings, would not fall if we were to have elected chairs.

• (1805)

Some of the alarmist talk coming from the government side suggests that democracy would be at risk, that the opposition would somehow form an insurrection and the seas would boil and the skies would fall. That is simply not the case. What we would have is greater credibility. What we would have is a better functioning committee.

We would have demonstrated at the committee level that members of Parliament can get along. As the Speaker himself is elected, there would be an attempt by government to actually work in an open-handed way with members of Parliament to do good things at the committee level, to pass legislation that is perhaps better functioning and better in its application.

This debate is very apropos to what is taking place. I feel there is a sea of change afoot. We see it in the province of Quebec and in provinces around the country where we could have as many as six or seven provincial elections in the next 10 to 14 months. We will see the leadership change in federal parties.

I met with students today representing CASA. In meeting with these young people they are looking for a sign of faith. They are looking for credibility and substance. They are looking for a sign that Parliament itself can modernize itself, and that members of Parliament can show an open mind. We know this is a partisan atmosphere, but at times we can strive for the greater good. I believe we are capable of that. I believe that if and when we do that we will see a greater interest and relevance of this place.

We will also see perhaps, and I say this with the greatest respect to members present and present company included, a greater participation in elections, participation in nominations to put names forward, and a direct involvement in a process that is fundamental to the functioning of this country. We have had an opportunity in each party to examine these issues in depth and to reflect upon our own policies.

We had a report on democratic reform that was adopted at our convention in Edmonton this summer. It spoke to this issue specifically and to many other issues. It spoke of the need, for example, to have greater free votes, fewer confidence votes, and to have this code of ethics that has been wanting adopted by the House of Commons so that it would apply to the ethics of members of Parliament and how they conduct themselves, not only here, but around the country.



*Adjournment Debate*

We talked about the power of the purse and the ability to have greater examination of how public money would be spent and how we should have fulsome examinations of that at the committee level. Much of what we do, the inner workings, the engine of how legislation is crafted and how legislation is adopted, is done by those committees so it comes back time and time again.

It would be advisable not to have parliamentary secretaries on those committees because they are the ever-present guiding hand of the Prime Minister. It is about this control and endless need of this particular Prime Minister to never relinquish the control that he has.

A noted political author, Donald Savoie of New Brunswick, spoke of the concentration of power. This individual, who has studied this subject matter extensively, echoes the sentiments of many. The former Prime Minister, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, said in the House today that democracy loses its strength gradually, by increments, and it takes vigilance and a concerted political will to stem the erosion of democracy by those who would seek to concentrate power in the hands of a few. He added that never before in the history of Canada has power been so concentrated in the hands of a few, a small handful of unelected political flacks in the Prime Minister's Office.

It is a sad commentary coming from a man who has served in the highest office in the land. He is echoing the sentiment of many members who have spoken today, many political commentators, editorialists, and persons at the Tim Hortons drive-through.

Canadians know things must change. They are looking to us to do it. They are looking to the government which has the power to do it. Members like the member for LaSalle—Émard have expressed the will but it is clear that when push comes to shove, it is like the new remix of the Elvis song "A little less conversation, a little more action please" is what has to happen. It must be demonstrated, played out here and around the country.

• (1810)

We have an opportunity to do that. There will be an opportunity for members to show that willingness next week when this matter comes to a vote. Much of the antagonism and much of the apathy will disappear when we see that happen. I look forward to seeing that next week.

**Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the remarks of the hon. member. I know that until yesterday he was the House leader for his party. I know he is embarking on new challenges. I must say that I have enjoyed tremendously working with him over recent years. I wanted to preface my remarks by saying that.

I want to get to the remarks that the member made. He used as an example of democracy remarks that he says show what great democratic values are in the House by quoting a speech of the member for Calgary Centre. Is he by any chance the same member who at one point was the prime minister of the country and who was prime minister nine months before he saw fit to recall Parliament?

**Mr. Peter MacKay:** Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the remarks that were made by the hon. government House leader. I too enjoyed my time as House leader and dealing with him on a daily

basis. He taught me much. What he taught me in particular was to watch what he did on many occasions. It also reminded me of how people change and the process of erosion sometimes of being around here too long.

I do not say that disrespectfully. Time and time again we have seen attempts by the government and the member to hearken back and to dredge up what happened one, two or three decades ago. The fact is there is now an opportunity. When these issues come forward, let us not forget where the control and the power rests. It rests in the hands of the member's party. His party has the power to make the decisions. It can point out things that were wrong in the past. It has the ability to change them.

What the member ceases to recognize time and time again is he may get a lot of play out of pointing out what was wrong in the past, but what is he doing about it and where has he been for a decade to make some change?

• (1815)

**The Deputy Speaker:** It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the business of supply are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, November 5 at 3:00 p.m.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

### INCOME TAX ACT

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I recently asked the government if it would consider amending the Income Tax Act by making a subtle change so that business fines, penalties and levies would not be considered legitimate business expenses and, therefore, tax deductible. It was my argument that when the Income Tax Act was first put together and approved, surely Parliament never intended that breaking the law would be considered tax deductible.

When it first came to my attention in 1999, when the supreme court ruled that this was in fact the case, that fines and penalties could be tax deductible, I was shocked. We cannot deduct our parking tickets or speeding tickets, but if a business gets fined \$1 million for dumping PCBs into the Red River in my home province of Manitoba it can deduct that on its income tax providing it was done in the course of operating its business or its enterprise. Most Canadians would be horrified to learn that.

It is my argument that Parliament surely never intended that. However the act is silent on the issue and therefore the supreme court, when it had to deal with it, had no alternative but to say that under the current act a business can deduct its fines.

*Adjournment Debate*

Surely there are other good arguments reasonable people can see here. It undermines the deterrent value of a fine if that fine can be reduced simply by filing it in our income tax. A business in British Columbia, for example, was fined \$270,000 for an offence, wrote the money off on its income tax and received \$125,000 back. A business might even get more back depending on its tax status in that particular year.

When the courts dealt with the law, they pointed out that if the act was silent on it then they had to ask whether Parliament was aware of the situation and whether it deliberately left the act silent on the issue.

Justice Bastarache reasoned that Parliament could not have intended to permit the deduction of fines under the taxing statute because that would have had the effect of undermining the effectiveness of the fine under the penalizing statute. In other words, the taxation statute would be undermining the impact of the statute under which the person was fined. It would be a contradiction. However the court ruled that the fines do stand.

Parliament has had the opportunity to deal with the issue of writing off fines as tax deductions. In 1994 we stopped the practice of allowing bribes to be deducted as a business expense.

We should note that in 1969 the United States passed legislation to specifically deny any penalty or fine ordered under law as a tax deduction. The United Kingdom and other countries have done the same. Therefore I was not satisfied with the answer I received from the government on this issue.

**Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government takes very seriously the issue of whether fines and penalties should be deductible for income tax purposes. However it is first important to clarify what penalties are and are not deductible under the law today.

First, not all fines and penalties are deductible for tax purposes. Only fines and penalties that are business expenses are deductible, and they must have been incurred in order to earn business income. Illegal payments to government officials are specifically denied a deduction, as are fines and penalties levied under the Income Tax Act.

Finally, and most important, the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled:

It is conceivable that a breach could be so egregious or repulsive that the fine subsequently imposed could not be justified as being incurred for the purpose of producing income.

What types of fines or penalties are deductible as a business expense? The supreme court reviewed the case of an egg producer who was assessed an over quota surcharge by a marketing board. The court found that the levy imposed was a legitimate business expense.

The supreme court suggested that certain fines and penalties would not be deductible. If, for example, a business owner were to commit a criminal offence or deliberately and illegally dump toxic waste, would the resulting fine be deductible? The supreme court has left open the door to challenge the suggestion that penalties for such offences and repulsive acts would be deducted. In this regard, the

government will monitor the effects of the supreme court decision to ensure that the fines for serious infractions are not deductible.

Would the hon. member have the government dictate to the business community which infractions are worthy of deductibility in a business context and which are not? This goes beyond the concern for fairly and accurately calculating the net profit of a taxpayer that should be subject of tax. The object of such a rule would be to address public policy concerns.

• (1820)

What types of fine or penalties would be contrary to public policy? If a trucking company can buy a permit to carry freight overweight, is it contrary to public policy to allow a business deduction for overweight charges? What about the case of the egg producer? Should the farmer have destroyed the eggs in order to avoid a non-deductible levy? There are other examples.

These examples suggest that many fines and penalties levied against Canadian business owners can be regarded as a normal risk of doing business. Sometimes they are simply a means of encouraging acceptable behaviour, regulating the marketplace or are in the nature of user fees. It is not necessarily contrary to public policy to incur these charges. Likewise, it would be unfair to deny a deduction as an expense if such levies are incurred in the ordinary day to day operation of business.

In creating a specific rule to delineate the deductibility of fines and penalties, the government would be attempting to draw a line between levies that are acceptable versus those that are not, even though the acceptability of the underlying actions of the business owner would depend on the facts and the circumstances in each case.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Mr. Speaker, the act does not differentiate between levies, fines and penalties, and therein lies the problem. That is why the supreme court ruled that in the absence of any clarifying language, fines and penalties must be allowed at this time.

The whole issue could be resolved with a simple amendment to the Income Tax Act which would simply say “for greater clarity”—and the Income Tax Act is full of these clauses—“no fine or penalty that is imposed by law on a taxpayer should be considered a tax deductible expense”. It is one simple line.

If we agree that it is bad public policy, for the reasons cited and others, then we can fix that very quickly. The United States and United Kingdom have done it. Australia and most western developed nations have taken active steps to clarify their revenue and income tax acts so that business fines are not allowed as tax deductible. I believe that we should be making the same move in this country.

**Mr. Bryon Wilfert:** Mr. Speaker, I hear my colleague. I would say to him that the supreme court decision already provides the government with a basis to challenge a business deduction for a penalty that results from a repulsive act or certainly beyond the scope.

*Adjournment Debate*

I would suggest to my colleague that the government will therefore continue to monitor on an ongoing basis various cases. We will consider the matter further in consideration of input from interested parties. We will take further comments both, I am sure, from this colleague and from others, and from those in the business community, and we will take further action if deemed warranted.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.25 p.m.)

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# CONTENTS

Thursday, October 31, 2002

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### Supplementary Estimates (A) 2002-2003

#### Government Response to Petitions

Mr. Regan ..... 1109

#### Public Safety Act, 2002

Mr. Collenette ..... 1109

Bill C-17. Introduction and first reading ..... 1109  
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) ..... 1109

#### Canadian Citizenship Act

Mr. Coderre ..... 1109

Bill C-18. Introduction and first reading ..... 1109  
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) ..... 1109

#### Interparliamentary Delegations

Ms. Bulte ..... 1109

Mr. Wilfert ..... 1109

Mr. Regan ..... 1109

#### Young Offenders Act

Mr. Cadman ..... 1109

Bill C-281. Introduction and first reading ..... 1109  
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) ..... 1110

#### Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

Mr. Cadman ..... 1110

Bill C-282. Introduction and first reading ..... 1110  
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) ..... 1110

#### Tax Conventions Implementation Act, 2002

Bill S-2. First reading ..... 1110

(Motion agreed to, and bill read the first time) ..... 1110

#### Committees of the House

##### Procedure and House Affairs

Mr. Adams ..... 1110

Motion for concurrence ..... 1110

Mr. Godin ..... 1111

Mr. Reynolds ..... 1111

Mr. Saada ..... 1112

Amendment ..... 1112

Miss Grey ..... 1112

Mr. Godin ..... 1112

Mr. Reynolds ..... 1113

Motion ..... 1113

Motion negatived ..... 1114

Mr. Borotsik ..... 1114

Mr. Harvard ..... 1115

Mr. Pallister ..... 1116

Mr. Clark ..... 1116

Mr. Harvard ..... 1116

Mr. Fitzpatrick ..... 1118

Mr. Desrochers ..... 1119

Mr. Bryden ..... 1119

Miss Grey ..... 1119

Mr. Gouk ..... 1120

Mr. Brien ..... 1120

Mr. Bryden ..... 1123

Mrs. Kraft Sloan ..... 1124

Mr. Forseth ..... 1125

Ms. Guay ..... 1126

Mrs. Desjarlais ..... 1126

Mr. Bachand (Saint-Jean) ..... 1128

Mr. Ritz ..... 1128

Amendment to amendment ..... 1128

Mr. Bachand (Saint-Jean) ..... 1129

Mr. Szabo ..... 1130

Mr. Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest) ..... 1132

Mrs. Parrish ..... 1133

Mrs. Desjarlais ..... 1133

Mr. Regan ..... 1134

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

### Tanzania

Mr. Lee ..... 1135

### Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Burton ..... 1135

### James Bay Cree

Mr. St-Julien ..... 1135

### Acrylique Weedon

Mr. Binet ..... 1135

### Sikh Community

Ms. Beaumier ..... 1136

### Noreen Edith Provost

Mr. White (North Vancouver) ..... 1136

### Eating Disorders

Ms. Neville ..... 1136

### Normand Desbiens

Ms. Girard-Bujold ..... 1136

### Father Michael Smith

Ms. Bulte ..... 1136

### Prairie Farmers

Mrs. Yelich ..... 1137

### International UNICEF Day

Mrs. Jennings ..... 1137

### Parliamentary Reform

Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre) ..... 1137

### Iraq

Ms. Lalonde ..... 1137

<b>Performing Arts Awards</b>			
Mr. Harvard .....	1137		
<b>Iraq</b>			
Mr. Casey .....	1138		
<b>Disability Tax Credit</b>			
Mr. Regan .....	1138		
<b>Queen's Jubilee Medal</b>			
Mr. Elley .....	1138		
<b>Canadian Peacekeepers</b>			
Ms. Folco .....	1138		
<b>ORAL QUESTION PERIOD</b>			
<b>Prairie Farmers</b>			
Mr. Harper .....	1139		
Mr. Goodale .....	1139		
Mr. Harper .....	1139		
Mr. Goodale .....	1139		
Mr. Harper .....	1139		
Mr. Goodale .....	1139		
Mr. Sorenson .....	1139		
Mr. Goodale .....	1139		
Mr. Sorenson .....	1139		
Mr. Goodale .....	1140		
<b>Budget Surplus</b>			
Mr. Duceppe .....	1140		
Mr. Chrétien .....	1140		
Mr. Duceppe .....	1140		
Mr. Chrétien .....	1140		
Ms. Picard .....	1140		
Mr. Manley .....	1140		
Ms. Picard .....	1140		
Mr. Manley .....	1140		
<b>Foreign Affairs</b>			
Ms. McDonough .....	1140		
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale) .....	1140		
Ms. McDonough .....	1141		
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale) .....	1141		
<b>Terrorism</b>			
Mr. Clark .....	1141		
Mr. Easter .....	1141		
Mr. Clark .....	1141		
Mr. McCallum (Markham) .....	1141		
<b>Correctional Service Canada</b>			
Mr. Toews .....	1141		
Mr. Boudria .....	1141		
Mr. Toews .....	1141		
Mr. Boudria .....	1141		
<b>Taxation</b>			
Mr. Gauthier .....	1142		
Mr. Manley .....	1142		
Mr. Gauthier .....	1142		
Mr. Manley .....	1142		
<b>Parliamentary Reform</b>			
Mr. Reynolds .....	1142		
Mr. Boudria .....	1142		
Mr. Reynolds .....	1142		
Mr. Boudria .....	1142		
<b>Official Languages</b>			
Mr. Sauvageau .....	1142		
Mr. Dion .....	1142		
Mr. Sauvageau .....	1142		
Mr. Collenette .....	1143		
<b>Terrorism</b>			
Mr. Day .....	1143		
Mr. Easter .....	1143		
Mr. Day .....	1143		
Mr. Easter .....	1143		
<b>The Environment</b>			
Mrs. Ur .....	1143		
Mr. Dhaliwal .....	1143		
<b>Coast Guard</b>			
Mr. Stoffer .....	1143		
Mr. Thibault .....	1143		
<b>Persons with Disabilities</b>			
Ms. Davies .....	1143		
Mrs. Stewart .....	1144		
<b>Financial Institutions</b>			
Mr. Brison .....	1144		
Mr. Manley .....	1144		
Mr. Brison .....	1144		
Mr. Manley .....	1144		
<b>Public Safety</b>			
Mr. Moore .....	1144		
Mr. Collenette .....	1144		
Mr. Moore .....	1144		
Mr. Collenette .....	1144		
<b>École de médecine vétérinaire de Saint-Hyacinthe</b>			
Mr. Plamondon .....	1144		
Mr. Vanclief .....	1144		
Mr. Plamondon .....	1145		
Mr. Vanclief .....	1145		
<b>Kyoto Protocol</b>			
Mr. Chatters .....	1145		
Mr. Dhaliwal .....	1145		
Mr. Chatters .....	1145		
Mr. Dhaliwal .....	1145		
<b>Canadian Heritage</b>			
Mr. Adams .....	1145		
Ms. Copps .....	1145		
<b>Finance</b>			
Mr. Harris .....	1145		
Mr. Manley .....	1145		
Mr. Harris .....	1145		
Mr. Manley .....	1146		

<b>Foreign Affairs</b>	
Mr. Bergeron .....	1146
Mr. Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale) .....	1146
<b>Privacy Commissioner</b>	
Mr. Lastewka .....	1146
Ms. Caplan .....	1146
<b>Government Contracts</b>	
Mr. Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest) .....	1146
Mr. Goodale .....	1146
<b>Ethics</b>	
Mr. Epp .....	1146
Mr. Boudria .....	1146
<b>Presence in Gallery</b>	
The Speaker .....	1146
<b>Business of the House</b>	
Mr. Reynolds .....	1147
Mr. Boudria .....	1147
<b>Points of Order</b>	
Mr. Boudria .....	1147
Mr. Reynolds .....	1148
Mr. Hearn .....	1148
Mrs. Desjarlais .....	1149
Mr. Strahl .....	1149
The Speaker .....	1149

#### GOVERNMENT ORDERS

<b>Supply</b>	
<b>Allotted Day—Election of Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs</b>	
Mr. Reynolds .....	1150

Motion .....	1150
Mrs. Parrish .....	1154
Mr. Hearn .....	1155
Mr. Regan .....	1155
Mr. Boudria .....	1155
Mr. Ritz .....	1158
Mr. Guimond .....	1158
Mrs. Desjarlais .....	1159
Mr. Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest) .....	1159
Mr. Epp .....	1160
Mr. Guimond .....	1160
Mr. Elley .....	1162
Mr. MacKay .....	1164
Mrs. Parrish .....	1165
Mr. Ritz .....	1165
Motion .....	1165
(Motion agreed to) .....	1165
Mrs. Desjarlais .....	1165
Mr. Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest) .....	1167
Mr. Proctor .....	1167
Mr. Hearn .....	1168
Mr. Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest) .....	1168
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre) .....	1169
Mr. Hearn .....	1169
Mr. MacKay .....	1170
Mr. Boudria .....	1171
Divisions deemed requested and deferred .....	1171

#### ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

<b>Income Tax Act</b>	
Mr. Martin (Winnipeg Centre) .....	1171
Mr. Wilfert .....	1172

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