

way an individual Canadian has of being heard in the House of Commons. This is the difference between it and Standing Order 26. This is why it is so important that this particular vehicle be protected and be understood in our procedure.

Therefore, I ask Madam Speaker to consider the representation, perhaps over a period of time, as it relates to "at length" and the question of unanimity, as well as to recognize the valuable instrument which in fact a petition represents in the long tradition of democracy.

Madam Speaker: Yes, I recognize that that is the function of petitions. It is to allow individuals some access to the House. I am basing my decision today mainly on practice because the wording of the Standing Order in fact, I am told by the experts with whom I have studied this question, refers back to the time when the courts were not equipped to deal with matters individual citizens would like to bring before the courts and, therefore, petitions were heard in the House of Commons in lieu of being heard by the courts. Somehow the wording of the Standing Order has continued to be what it was, referring to circumstances which are not prevalent today. Therefore, the custom of the House has been to allow petitions to be presented to the House with brief statements on the part of hon. members presenting the petitions. But only through the use of unanimous consent have we allowed petitions to be read by the Clerk.

Even more important, the matter of discussing petitions, I do not know of any precedents when petitions were discussed; they might have existed. But I insist that we cannot use the vehicle of petitions, which is a legitimate one, to present the views of citizens before the House of Commons, to supersede the normal business of the House and to go into urgent debate such as would be allowed under Standing Order 26.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. NIELSEN—RECOGNITION OF MEMBERS

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Madam Speaker, I rise at the earliest opportunity on a question of privilege.

Mr. Deans: I am seeking the floor on a point of order.

Mr. Nielsen: I am on a question of privilege; it supersedes a point of order.

I rise at the earliest opportunity to ensure that an incident is recorded in the official debates of the House which Madam Speaker did not notice because your head was bowed and you were looking at your Standing Orders and obtaining advice from your Table adviser. While you were doing that, I heard you make an inquiry of your Table adviser; you were asking for a section of the Standing Orders. I had it and I wished to assist by rising and informing the Chair of the section number

Point of Order—Mr. Wenman

of the Standing Orders. I asked that my microphone be activated. I know that the operator heard me ask because he shook his head and made a gesture of helplessness because it had to be your decision that the microphone be turned on. I know I was heard by the *Hansard* reporter because I am too close not to be heard, even without the microphone. I hope those words will appear in today's official record of the debates in the chamber because it proved precisely the point I gave notice of a few moments ago and will now be raising tomorrow.

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POINTS OF ORDER

MR. DEANS—PROCEDURE RESPECTING READING OF PETITIONS

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask you to consider something with regard to the point of order raised by the hon. member for Fraser Valley West (Mr. Wenman). The question, as I understand it today and as I understood it perhaps a week or a week and a half ago, was whether or not unanimous consent is required for a petition to be read. I am sure Madam Speaker will recall that at that time I intervened in the discussion in an effort to understand more clearly the ramifications of one section of the Standing Orders and the references in Beauséne at page 213. I wonder whether Madam Speaker would be kind enough to take into account when you are considering this matter further, as no doubt you will be, the references on page 820 of Erskine May's nineteenth edition, wherein there is a very succinct reference to what might be considered for immediate discussion in terms of a petition.

The question which has arisen here over the last two weeks is not whether there should be immediate discussion, but whether or not the petition might be read. But unfortunately as things seem always to occur, a confusion reigns between discussion stage, which may ultimately be allowed, and the request for the reading of the petition.

I have come to the conclusion from reading Beauséne that Madam Speaker's ruling, although I must confess I am not entirely happy, is within the bounds of Beauséne inasmuch as it indicates that a petition, having been presented, which is the case, and having been in order as to form, may with unanimous consent be read by the Clerk. However, I suggest that Standing Order 67(8) creates an ambiguity or confusion. I ask respectfully whether at some point in the near future Madam Speaker might give consideration to providing us with some guidance as to how these matters are to be interpreted by the House.

Madam Speaker: This is why I am allowing a discussion on this matter. I will take that suggestion and try to clarify the meaning of that Standing Order.