

lunch recess that he was not going to be here this afternoon, and I so advised the House.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): Mr. Chairman, what the minister has said is correct. He said there were some travel difficulties. I have in my hand a document which lists the schedule or itinerary of a number of Cabinet ministers, one of which is the President of the Treasury Board. This document indicates that the President of the Treasury Board was supposed to leave here at eight o'clock this morning to go to Saskatoon. He obviously knew last night, as a result of the announcement by the Government House Leader, that the first item of business today would be the resumption of consideration by the committee of the government's organization bill. I assume that because of that knowledge, and there may have been other reasons, the minister decided to cancel that proposed trip.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That's their loss and our loss too.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): He cancelled his proposed visit to Saskatchewan. In addition to that itinerary, there is an itinerary for other members of the Cabinet. They all emanate from the same place. There is an itinerary for the President of the Treasury Board and for the Hon. Jack Davis, the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry. I assume because they are altogether, the President of the Treasury Board would have known about this. That is why I made the remark earlier when the minister stood up in the House and said with great precision that there were some travel difficulties which kept the minister away. In fact, the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry was then on the way to meet an obligation as outlined in this schedule.

The schedule indicates that on Friday, February 12—that is today in case you were not sure about it—at 12.30 p.m., about the time the President of the Treasury Board rose in this House, the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry was scheduled to depart Ottawa by *Jetstar*, arriving at the Saskatoon airport at 3.15 this afternoon. How could the minister stand up and say with great precision that this involved travel difficulties? I suggest he was deliberately misleading the House by not telling the House the facts of the matter. Furthermore, Mr. Chairman—

The Acting Chairman (Mr. Richard): Order, please. I think if the hon. member for Skeena had a point he has made it. At the present time we are not discussing the itinerary of the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry. I think the House knows exactly what the hon. member had in mind and I do not think we are now entitled to go further into the itinerary of the minister. If there is a charge to be made against anyone, a charge should be made. We should not be discussing or listening to a recitation about the travels of hon. ministers.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): I have great respect for your view about this, Mr. Chairman, but the President of the Treasury Board initiated this recitation this morning in an incomplete and inaccurate way. I think the committee

Government Organization Act, 1970

is entitled to know the facts of the situation, and I suggest they are not as the President of the Treasury Board related them.

The Acting Chairman (Mr. Richard): Let me say to the hon. member for Skeena that unless he has something new to add he has explained very clearly what he wanted to say about the absence of the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry. I am sure he does not want to beat the point to death.

Mr. Howard (Skeena): You are quite right, Mr. Chairman, I explained the matter clearly up to the point of the minister's departure from Ottawa. I think the committee is entitled to know why the minister is not here. He is not here for the simple reason he had a very pressing engagement in Saskatchewan which he considered more important than his attendance at Parliament and more important than the question of environmental control. Apparently, the President of the Treasury Board also considered this more important. Apparently, the entire Cabinet considered it far more important than environmental control in this nation. The progress of this bill to set up a department of environment is obviously less important than a meeting at four o'clock Saskatchewan time where the minister is attending a reception of the Biggar Liberal party.

• (3:00 p.m.)

That is what is more important, Mr. Chairman, and that is what should be brought out. That is the truth that should be told in the House, not the cover-up, phony excuse used by the President of the Treasury Board. That is exactly what it was, a phony excuse in which he referred to travel difficulties. The only travel difficulties were that the minister intended all along to go to the reception sponsored by the Liberal party in Biggar, Saskatchewan, and to disregard completely the business of the House and the business of this nation in its care and concern for environmental factors.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Howard (Skeena): It is a shameful situation. In addition to that, the President of the Treasury Board knew this precisely and in the face of that and without disclosing it to the House he stood up and barefacedly said that he learned by accident in the afternoon that the minister will not be here, and because he will not be here this afternoon, regrettable as that is, we should stand these matters. That is the first cover-up, to put the matter to one side because the Liberals in Biggar are more important than the people of this nation.

If the President of the Treasury Board wanted to be truthful, he should have put it on the record. But it is obvious from the way he is approaching the English language and from the way he approached the secret document about the employment of Francophones that the minister is not concerned about telling the truth of the matter; he is only concerned about using the English language to cover up the truth.