

Point of Order

yesterday for this very historical debate. I know that she would want me to indicate to the House and to citizens watching that it had been her intention to speak on this matter.

I regret that events unfolded as they did, with the government deciding to shorten the debate, keep it at a high level—which I think is something we all should be pleased with—and have the vote yesterday afternoon, which we did.

I regret the way events proceeded. It is an indication of how we are not really negotiating the way we should on a number of matters to make sure that the House operates smoothly.

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I just want to be very clear on what happened yesterday.

The House will know I went on the record during what is known as the business statement immediately after Question Period. I suggested at that time that we were prepared to have an extended debate, with the proviso that there be no dilatory motions and that when the last speaker finished speaking on Thursday night, the debate would adjourn to Friday and Friday's debate would adjourn to Monday. We were prepared to extend the hours on both evenings. Both the Liberal Party and the NDP refused the offer for extended hours and I see no difficulty in that. The offer was made in good faith and accepted by the House in good faith. That was the basis on which we were going to call the debate.

The leader of the Opposition stated very clearly, as reported at page 8408 of *Hansard*

—we will support this resolution because, above all, it calls for the reaffirmation of the importance of bilingualism—

That is on the record.

When the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville spoke on behalf of the New Democratic Party he said, "We support the resolution before the House today".

We had a debate joined by the representatives of all three parties in which it was made very clear that all three parties in the House were going to support the debate. I do remember speaking with my hon. friend from Beaver River. She asked me in my position as Government House Leader how I thought it would work. I said here is what we are proposing to the other

two parties. I said I did not know whether they would accept it or not. As it turned out they did not accept it.

Now this is the situation. The House will know, members who are here will know that when debate collapses on a motion a vote can be called by the Chair. I suggest that is exactly what happened. The three parties had discussions. The House will know there was excellent attendance in the House yesterday for a major speech. As I told my friend, during the speech of the leader of the Liberal party the Prime Minister and I discussed it with the Deputy Prime Minister and other colleagues. We decided that since there was a good tone coming from the Liberal party's speech that we would see if there was a disposition at that time to have a unanimous resolution of this House for all three parties to enjoin and speak out for Canadians on this very important principle.

I guess I have to say that a lot of hours go into this job from everybody. Being a member of Parliament means that you have to be on top of what is going on in this House while the House is open and sitting. If you cannot be there yourself then you have party people who keep you advised as to what is happening and what your responsibilities are. If you do not want to go through your party officials you can always ask the Table. The officers would have told you that if debate did not go until 5.12 yesterday that the question could be called. That is what happened. It was done with the unanimous endorsement of the leaders of the three parties who represent some 294 constituencies in this country. We spoke out on this very important principle affirming that this is a bilingual country, supporting Meech Lake and the Official Languages Act and I submit, Mr. Speaker, that any elected MP who wanted to be here to speak on that issue knew it was going to be called—it was very clear—and should have been here to make his or her speech and support the resolution.

We have done that. I believe we are fully on the record as to what we were trying to do at the time we were trying to do it. Events changed. Everybody who is here knows that this is a very fluid place and that things happen. Sometimes things look like it is impossible that they will take place and suddenly you have consensus. Yesterday we had that consensus among the three major parties in this country. We reaffirmed a very basic