

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

I do not wish to bore the House today, Mr. Speaker, with all of the arguments in favour of the Free Trade Agreement. It is an agreement that has been accepted by the Canadian people, despite the many thousands of attempts to derail it along the way, including the request of the Senate by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) to block the legislation until such time as a general election was called.

The real issue before the House today relates to the reasons given by the Opposition for its stand against the timely approval of the legislation to implement the Free Trade Agreement. The only argument now relevant has to do with why the Opposition continues to try to prevent the agreement from going into effect in a timely manner.

I wish to explain why Parliament should approve the implementing legislation without amendment so that the Free Trade Agreement will go into effect on January 1, 1989.

On July 20 last, when the Leader of the Opposition announced that he would use the Liberal majority in the Senate to block the implementing legislation until an election was called, he was asked what would happen in the event that the Government were returned with a majority, and he replied:

"We would agree to a speedy passage—"

Speedy: s-p-e-e-d-y. He continued:

"—speedy passage, recognizing the verdict of the Canadian people, and so would our Senate colleagues, that is quite clear . . . (We would) accept whatever that decision is on an expeditious basis, I think that's a democratic procedure . . . Let Canadians decide."

That is what the Leader of the Opposition said then. Well, what has happened to the "speedy passage" that he then promised the Canadian people? What has happened to the "expeditious basis", Mr. Speaker, that he then spoke of?

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): You are tied up in your own procedural knots. That is the problem.

Mr. Crosbie: The Leader of the Opposition was equally clear on November 22 last. The events of November 21 had clarified his mind wonderfully. On November 22 last, he said this:

"You know we let the people decide. The people have decided, so that having stated our case, well then, let matters proceed."

Well, why is it that since this House came into session, he has done everything he can to stop matters from proceeding? What is the logic in that?

Some Hon. Members: Nonsense!

Mr. Crosbie: Is the Leader of the Opposition afraid of some of the visages that we see in the benches opposite, Mr. Speaker? Have they barracked him in the caucus and made him change his position from that which he put forth on July 20, and November 22, respectively? Is the Leader of the Opposition in control of his caucus, or is he not? Does he lead and do they follow? Or, does he not lead and do they not follow?

Those are the questions that this conundrum poses.

What does the Opposition Leader say now? He says that the Government has the right to introduce the legislation but no right to expect speedy passage. But on July 20 last, that is exactly what he said he would do: Give speedy passage if we were returned with a majority.

Well, we were returned with a majority. What has happened?

There has been no explanation, adequate or otherwise, for the Leader of the Opposition reversing his position.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, in the end, that isn't what really matters; what matters is our responsibility as a Government, and that responsibility points to early passage of the implementing legislation, for two reasons: We are the Government that has been elected and, as such, we have a responsibility to see that the legislation in question is passed and to see that it is passed by January 1, 1989.

In the Free Trade Agreement, Canada committed itself to the date of January 1, 1989, in terms of the agreement entering into force and effect.

We must adhere to our treaty obligations if we are to expect others to adhere to theirs. Canada agreed, 14 months ago, that January 1, 1989, would be the date for the entering into force of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. A period of 14 months presented us with sufficient time to see that that was done. The Americans have met their obligation in that regard. We have had to have an election to ensure that we could carry out our obligation. We have had that election. We have convinced the Canadian public. Now we have to adhere to our treaty obligations and see that the agreement comes into force on January 1, 1989.

I am not aware of any instance, Mr. Speaker, where a Government of this country entered into a solemn international obligation and was later prevented by an obstructionist Parliament or by an unelected Senate from carrying out that obligation.