

*Privilege—Mr. McGrath*

**Madam Speaker:** I think the debate has gone on long enough. I have invited members to speak on the question of privilege itself, but as I said before I will listen to one more speaker on the government side. We have heard many, many speeches, perhaps not an equal number, but we have heard expressions of opinion on both sides of the House. I will now hear one more speaker.

● (1640)

**Hon. Jim Fleming (Minister of State, Multiculturalism):** Madam Speaker, I will try to be brief and will try to cover, in the light of your admonition to all of us in this House, your point that we should indeed speak to the question of whether or not there is a question of privilege on this issue.

I would argue of course that there is not a question of privilege. There may be an issue for debate, and I think there has been quite an airing of that issue today; certainly in question period yesterday and today it was discussed extensively. I want to touch on a few points made by various members. At the outset we had the member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae), with what—I hate to get into crazy and wild rhetoric—seemed to me to be pretty hysterical puffery in making his case. He seems to forget the intellectual leader of the New Democratic Party, the Premier of Saskatchewan, is the one who seems to have heightened this, according to some of the questions of the official opposition today, saying that he is prepared to advertise. And he has not indicated he is prepared to get the approval of his legislature or the other nine legislatures in Canada before any of the premiers do that. Clearly, Mr. Bennett has not done that.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Fleming:** I have listened, I think, with some courtesy to the interjections of all the various members and I hope I will have the chance to make my contribution.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) said—and I have three points of his, I think, with which I have a difference—that we, the government, have a privilege that others do not have to present our case. I believe I am quoting him correctly, in sense at least. I gather he means by that that before parliamentary approval we can present a case that would be the case simply of our party rather than the case of something approved by Parliament or, as I have argued earlier, reflecting all sides of the House, and I argued that that has not taken place.

**Mr. Orlikow:** At the taxpayers' expense.

**Mr. Fleming:** At taxpayers' expense. I argue that that has not taken place. I argue that the constitutional ads which ran in August, indeed, were quite legitimate because they called for constitutional reform. They expressed the view that it was important to update our constitution. I believe that reflects the public statements by leaders on all sides of this House and all

the members I know of—I cannot remember anyone saying that there should not be constitutional reform.

I repeat the point made by one or two members on this side who have been able to speak, that the hon. member for Edmonton East (Mr. Yurko) had unanimous support for a motion that called for constitutional reform. So I cannot see how this debate today on a question of privilege makes any sense whatsoever.

**Mr. Clark:** You had better correct that, Jim.

**An hon. Member:** It's in the record.

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please. I would plead with the members to let the minister make his speech without interruptions. We have had a long debate on this question. I have restricted the speeches and I think hon. members will agree that they have had a fair chance to express themselves. Therefore, in order that we may continue with the proceedings of the House, I plead with hon. members to allow the minister to make his point.

**Mr. Clark:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I know that it would be the furthest thing from the minister's mind to mislead the House deliberately. He made a reference to the content of the motion moved by the hon. member for Edmonton East (Mr. Yurko) and is suggesting it had a broad content. That motion, as he will recall, dealt specifically and in a limited way with the question of patriation. I am sure the minister would want to correct the record.

**Mr. Fleming:** Madam Speaker, I do not think there is anything to be corrected because I put it in a dual context, of that motion, the speeches given, and the position of the various leaders in this House throughout the referendum.

**Mr. Nielsen:** That was patriation only, not reform.

**Mr. Fleming:** Madam Speaker, I will try to continue, despite the rude interruptions of hon. members opposite. I did not interrupt them and I listened to them carefully during their offerings this afternoon.

I might say again that in the airing of the issue during the time the campaign took place, principally in August,—and there was a considerable airing—there were statements made by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), by the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty), the former minister of state for treasury board, and I might say because I take some responsibility in my job and I was concerned that we act fairly in this policy,—something I have tried to exemplify in my statements last night, and again today—through the summer period we did do a test of the ten major dailies across the country to find out how the Canadian public were reacting to the criticism put forward by the opposition, which is their legitimate right, and I found it interesting that 33 out of 950 contributions from Canadians were about half and half on this issue. So I say again, it has had an airing and I do not think the judgment of the Canadian people is that those ads were unfair.