

purpose. Here the government House leader, who supposedly knows about these matters, made this outrageously wrong statement in his introductory remarks.

Here we have unprecedented powers being given to an officer of Parliament who will be left to run a referendum campaign receiving advice from the minister to whom he has to account. He has to account to someone for some purposes to a minister. Who will tell him how to run the election? No doubt this minister will. He is well-known to be arrogant and a bully. He will bully the Chief Electoral Officer. This should not happen. This power should not be granted without some checks and balances and the proper check is to have the regulations brought to this House.

What happens? The bill says you do not have to bring them for scrutiny under the regulations act. Take a look at the bill. I urge hon. members to read this bill. That needs to be adjusted.

The government commissioned a report on elections in this country that cost some \$18 million. The report dealt with issues such as who has the right to vote in elections. There are several outstanding charter claims on this very issue that have been litigated in the courts and that are currently outstanding.

One of them is the right of inmates and prisoners to vote. That issue is still unresolved. It is waiting to go to the Supreme Court of Canada. Two high courts of appeal decisions have given inmates the right to vote. You would have thought that in dealing with legislation in a referendum, the government would have brought these forward and said we have to deal with these now because all these people currently have a right to vote. The act is completely silent on this issue.

Where is the leadership? Where is the thought? After spending \$18 million you would think it could come up with some ideas, put them in the bill and try to deal with it. We have a committee working on it but the evidence we now have is that committee cannot get anywhere because the Chief Electoral Officer could not implement changes in the Canada Elections Act while he is having to deal with the referendum.

It has to be dealt with in this bill. The government must have known that when it introduced the bill last Friday and it failed to deal with the issues.

### *Government Orders*

These are serious omissions. This bill has been introduced by a government that does not know what it is doing. We always have said that and it is made manifest by the very flawed nature of this piece of legislation. While we may end up supporting the thing because it has to be done, we all recognize that, the fact is we are going to be pressing for some very significant changes in committee.

I hope that hon. members on the other side will support the very sensible changes. I see a member who will support it. I am sure the minister of homelessness will do his best to do so as well.

I urge him in cabinet to get after his colleagues and say: "Fix this bill. Do not introduce such trash in the House. Get it right the first time so that it is something close to what we as Canadian legislators can expect from a government which is expected to show leadership and which has had years and years to draft this bill".

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski):** Before I recognize the hon. member for Ottawa Centre—it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Edmonton Southeast—Canada Assistance Plan; the hon. member for Lambton—Middlesex—Beef industry; the hon. member for Victoria—National Defence; and the hon. member for Algoma—Denison Mines.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre):** Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the House to discuss the bill that deals with the question of the referendum.

It was our leader, who in last years called on the government to introduce legislation that would deal with the question of referenda. At that time, he promised the government to go full out, he as well as every member of his caucus, in order to defend the interests of Canada and the unity of Canada.

At that time, the Leader of the Opposition called on the government to move on this issue on a non-partisan basis. He called on the government at the time to take the approach of consultation with the opposition.