

Business of the House

Since Easter is very early this year, it may be useful if I give in general terms an outline of the business which is still ahead of us. We will have seven allotted days, probably one each week commencing with Thursday, February 2. In addition to the need to deal with these allotted days, the government will also propose legislation creating the post control monitoring agency, and bills and amendments to the Public Service Staff Relations Act with regard to the decontrol period. We will also bring forward amendments to the Farm Credit Act and the amendments to the Criminal Code, the Official Secrets Act and the Post Office Act. These bills will all warrant early consideration. That is a preview of the business I foresee for the early period before the Easter break.

As the hon. member knows, there are also bills in the committees of the House and bills standing on the order paper for second reading. There are bills that relate to the constitution and the holding of a national referendum which have been mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, which we will attempt to bring forward in this session.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I want to thank the Deputy Prime Minister for that extensive list. However, I note that there is one glaring omission from that list in terms of the legislative program. That is the question of a budget, which has been mentioned for around the end of March, which I believe was the general phrase used. Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell me today whether it is the intention of the government to bring down a budget prior to the anticipated Easter recess of the House? Naturally we think it should be brought in at a much earlier date. Would he deal with that, and could he deal with the suggestion that there be a special committee of this House, in the place of a standing committee, to deal with the pipeline legislation, which is another matter?

In addition, Sir, would he inform the House whether or not the hon. Minister of Finance will be here today to deal with the employment tax credit legislation himself? I realize the Minister is at a federal-provincial conference and some of his duties take him there. But is there any time during the next few days that he can devote to the House of Commons and be here for part of the debate since the minister has given so much importance to the passage of this bill? I might say to the hon. gentleman we do not intend to delay passage of the bill.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, you will note that the Deputy Prime Minister has been giving us a fairly long-range picture of the business of the session. However, may I ask him about two pieces of legislation he has not yet mentioned? As he knows, his colleague, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, said yesterday that he expected to bring to the House some news about veterans of the First World War. He made that statement in the context of answers to various questions concerning veterans affairs. My question is: will there be legislation affecting veterans in this session? At the same time, may I ask if there will be any legislation in the name of the Minister of National Health and Welfare, such as the social services act, or legislation respecting pensions?

[Mr. MacEachen.]

● (1512)

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I would like first to deal with the question raised by the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton. It is not possible for me to announce a budget date, or indeed when and if there will be a budget. That is a matter for the Minister of Finance and I have not had an opportunity to discuss it with him. My answer is not intended to declare anything except my inability to answer the question, and no other implications or conclusions should be drawn from it.

I have concluded that it would be desirable to strike a special committee in order to study the pipeline legislation. I hope that we can make whatever arrangements are necessary before we give the bill second reading, call it for second reading, or even introduce it.

We are calling the employment tax credit bill today. The Minister of Finance is currently meeting with the finance ministers of the provinces, but I expect that he will be available in the House tomorrow afternoon to deal with the bill in committee stage, if it is at that stage. I understand it is impossible for him to be in the House today for second reading because of the meetings to which the hon. member has already referred.

Mr. Clark: And tonight?

Mr. MacEachen: Unfortunately, or fortunately, the meetings are still continuing with the finance ministers. It will not be possible for the Minister of Finance to disengage until late tonight, but he will be in the House just as soon as he can, either tonight or tomorrow.

I can tell the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre that the bills to which he refers are not on my list and it is not possible for me to indicate that they will get on the list at any point, but one never knows.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, there is one matter that the government House leader alluded to, the question of the availability of the minister for the purpose of the employment tax credit bill. I want to emphasize to him, through you, Sir, that we are very anxious to have that bill proceed. As we have indicated, it has been too late in coming, and now that it is here it should not be delayed. However, we do wish to examine the minister. We think it is quite important because the government seems to attach so much importance to that program.

I wonder if the government House leader would consider extending the hours of the sitting tonight so that the minister could be here and we could go through committee of the whole proceedings after his meetings. He may not be able to give that answer right now. We would certainly be willing to stay to have that done because it is an important piece of legislation.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly raise that with the minister. If the minister can be available, it might be a very good idea to try to give the bill full treatment today, second reading and the committee stage. If there are no