

I indicated at that time it probably would be in the interests of the situation if the matter was heard briefly this morning and I will hear the hon. member in just a moment.

I should indicate that the hon. member for Algoma, I understand, has an application and I will hear that subsequently. I will hear the point of order first.

Mr. David Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I rise today, as I have on two previous occasions to speak on this particular matter. I will deal very briefly with Standing Order 52 and a number of the subsections which are contained therein and also the wide latitude which is given to the Chair in determining whether or not a subject matter is deemed under that particular provision of the Standing Orders.

I read for the Chair paragraph 387 from the sixth edition of Beauchesne's where it says:

From time to time, this procedure has been referred to as "an emergency debate"; this however is not exclusively the case. Standing Order 52 gives considerable discretion to the Speaker in deciding if a subject is a proper matter to be brought before the House in this way. The Standing Order is clear that the question be specific and must require urgent consideration. It must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate. But most decisions based on these conditions are bound to be subjective and few clear cut decisions can be made. In making his ruling, the Speaker may, on occasion, take into account the general wish of the House to have a debate.

I wish to share with the Chair that in the past, members of the government, and I believe the Chair has alluded to this in statements it has made, that somehow, if an emergency debate was granted it would take away from "the timely business of the government". As we all know, the government has a legitimate right to set the agenda of House business.

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, to members of this House that this is not the case. Because the sitting hours of the House have changed, in no way will the granting of a debate under the provisions of Standing Order 52 interfere with the business of the government which it so rightly puts before this House.

The second point is this. In the past members have tried to interpret this provision as a means or as a tool for opposition members to cause delay, using it as a dilatory tactic on behalf of the opposition to impede the govern-

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ment in whatever initiatives it has before the House. That is not the case at all, Mr. Speaker. As I said in my first remark, it in no way interferes with the government and its agenda and in no way could it be deemed or interpreted as a dilatory tactic.

The third point I raise for your consideration, Mr. Speaker, is the concept of reform, the reform which was talked about in the McGrath report which was tabled in this House. The McGrath report reflected the views of the House that more special debates ought to be held. The McGrath report made reference to having more special debates on a variety of subject matters.

Fourth, if this particular provision was granted on a more timely basis, and that in no way reflects upon the previous decisions of the Chair, it opens the possibility for all members of Parliament, not just those in the Official Opposition or independent members, but members of all other parties in this House, to have ample opportunity to participate in special debates.

A number of members, particularly the government House leader and myself, as well as the House leader for the New Democratic Party, have talked about reform. We have seen some reforms in this House over the last 12 months. But what better way is there for this Parliament to reform itself than to have debate on subject matters which members of Parliament feel important?

I give the example, if I may, in concluding, of the debate that is being requested with regard to supply management. It was requested on Monday, it was requested on Tuesday and it was requested on Wednesday by both the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party. That is a substantial number of members who believe that this matter is sufficiently important to have a debate. It is not a frivolous item; it has profound effects on the supply management system in Canada. It is of great interest, not only to those who are direct investors in the supply management system across the country but I believe it is also of great concern to a lot of Canadians. I think this would be a good example, in the spirit of reform that we at least have talked about in this Chamber, that perhaps the interpretation and discretion as exercised by the Chair may wish to take those thoughts into consideration.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, it is not a dilatory tactic. It does not interfere with the business of the government