

Adjournment Debate

members would agree with that.

We have taken a stand on this side of the House to eliminate the GST. It was announced in the finance committee the other day that this study would begin right away. By the end of June we will have all the possible alternatives which will be much more fair, simple and efficient.

Recently the government showed it was serious in going on the offensive against the underground economy by taking on the tobacco issues. The changes in taxation were announced eliminating financial incentives that drove the significant subsector of the underground economy. Already there have been some reports of reductions in the volume of tobacco being smuggled into Canada which shows the effectiveness of that particular policy.

The Department of Finance is working closely with Revenue Canada looking for ways to streamline and simplify the system.

I also want to say we have to be careful when we loosely throw around some of these tax deductions as being special privileges for the wealthy. I share the member's view with the Skydome box holders. However, with respect to tourism and fishing trips these measures were put in to aid small business tourism operators. If all of a sudden we were to eliminate all of those things it would cause significant unemployment. We have to be very careful in how we address those particular deductions. I know the member would not want to see an adverse condition because of a reckless tax preference cut in our tax act that would affect an industry which he too is so proud of.

I want to acknowledge that we recognize there are some serious flaws in the tax act of Canada. We take all of the member's specific points today and hope to address them in the near future.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin): Madam Speaker, my topic is really quite timely given the fact that we expected a vote a few minutes ago and suddenly it was put off.

The other day I asked the Prime Minister when he would announce to the House that the government would not consider the defeat of a government motion including a spending measure to constitute the expression of non-confidence in the government unless it is immediately followed by a formal motion of non-confidence.

It is time to release the members of Parliament from the iron cage of party discipline in this country. I think that the House of Commons is probably one of the most regimented parliamentary systems in the world. We must not forget that we were sent here by the people of Canada. We were sent here to represent the views of the people of this great nation, not the wills of the political parties.

It is also time to debunk the myth that the government must win every vote or resign. The failure of a government measure, even a spending initiative, does not automatically have to mean the defeat of the government.

• (1840)

The Prime Minister, the cabinet and the bureaucrats set policy and dictate the course of action with the usual assurances of: "Don't worry. We know what we are doing. We know what is best". The time has come to give the electorate greater say in government.

For too long it has been politics first. Now it is time to put people first. How can we do this? We can loosen the chains. We can allow for free votes in the House of Commons. If for example a vote on a budget measure or motion was negative, it could be sent back to committee and improved before coming again to the House. If the government loses the non-confidence motion that follows that motion, then it would have to resign and call a general election. The people of Canada want more direct democracy and I would encourage the Prime Minister to comply with their wishes.

The Constitution provides for this. All the Prime Minister needs to do is rise in his place and declare that the government will not consider the defeat of a government motion including a spending measure to constitute an expression of non-confidence in the government unless it is immediately followed by a formal non-confidence motion.

Ms. Jean Augustine (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, on February 2, 1994 the member for Wetaskiwin questioned the Prime Minister on the issue of free votes.

The hon. member should realize that this government has done more to champion the cause of House of Commons reform in the first 100 days of its mandate than the previous government did in nine long years.

On Monday, February 7, the government House leader placed before this House a framework for renewal. This framework addressed a wide range of issues this government believes will reinstate the trust and respect that Canadians want to have in their institutions.

On the subject of free votes it must be noted that this is not a matter dealt with now by the standing orders of the House. Instead it is a matter to be dealt with by each party and each party's members themselves.

This is why the hon. member will note that in part VII of the government House leader's motion there is a reference to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to examine free votes in the House of Commons and other important matters.

Therefore I ask the hon. member and his party to fully participate in this process. I am sure he agrees with me when I