

Mr. Gauthier: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. We will be offering the minister some comments on his comments tonight. I am sure that he will appreciate—if he stays around—that we have made suggestions. We will make some more suggestions.

In that context, my caucus members would like to speak on this motion and therefore we would like to split our 20-minute allocation of time when the time comes around to the Liberal caucus into two 10-minute speeches, followed by a period of 5 minutes for comments and questions. In that way, we will get twice as many members of the Liberal caucus to speak. We hope the minister will stay around and listen to us because we have a lot of good suggestions to make to him.

Mrs. Beryl Gaffney (Nepean): Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to have the opportunity to address the House on this most critical issue that is before us today.

For months we members of the opposition party have been trying to find the answers to many questions from this government, but to no avail.

We agreed with many things that they did. We agreed with the government's imposition of mandatory, economic sanctions against Iraq. We supported the use of military forces under the authority of the UN, to ensure sanctions are upheld but we strongly disagreed with this government's decision to dispatch these forces before the UN authorized such action.

The government announced the dispatch of forces on August 10 and the UN Security Council only authorized such action by its member states on August 25. In addition, this was done without the recall of Parliament.

We called on the government to recall to Parliament so that this crisis and Canada's role in it could be debated. The government refused to do so. We now have the dubious honour, in the Parliament of Canada, of being the only western democracy not to have recalled its national legislative body or to have otherwise extensively consulted with legislators.

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What does this mean, besides being an embarrassment to all Canadians? It means that Canadians were not granted the democratic freedom of having their elected officials bring their very real concerns to the floor of this House on an issue of this magnitude. We in this party believe that the government should have made an explicit commitment to Parliament not only to consult it but to also allow the House to decide, by way of a vote, whether or not Canada should actively participate in or otherwise support, an offensive military action against Iraq, before such action occurs.

This did not happen, nor is it happening with this debate on this particular motion. About the only thing the government motion before the House and its subsequent debate are allowing is, quite literally, an eleventh and a half hour airing of feelings.

Thousands upon thousands of people have collectively written or phoned their members of Parliament to show that they want peace. We keep talking about war. What is wrong with talking about peace? They are sending a message to this government that Canadians do not want war.

Of the dozens of constituents who have contacted my office in the past few days, only two have said they support the motion of this government. All the others are saying: give diplomacy, give sanctions and, therefore, peace a chance; we do not want war.

I would like to read from a few of the letters which came to my office. From a letter to the Prime Minister, I read: "Dear Mr. Mulroney: We would like to encourage you to continue a peaceful, non-military settlement in the Middle East. We believe the enforcement of sanctions must be given a chance to work. Canada must be courageous for peace". This letter was signed by 150 parishioners of the City View United Church, in the city of Nepean.

The second letter comes from a person, whose name I will not give, for obvious reasons. He says: "Canada has built a strong reputation with the United Nations as a country of peacekeepers. Let's keep the reputation; we are not aggressors. As a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, I am proud to be a peacekeeper and that doesn't mean being on the offensive. Have we given enough time for the sanctions imposed to work? I don't think so. Do we have to be American followers? I don't think so. Let us be a country that believes in peace and not commit ourselves to war".