HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 12, 1987

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT—STATEMENT BY MEMBER

Mr. Speaker: I should bring to the attention of Hon. Members that the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) has requested that he be granted leave to make a statement at this time, and I recognize the Hon. Member.

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise on a matter of privilege.

On April 13, I directed questions to the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Mazankowski) on whether the Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport (Mr. Jelinek) had violated the Code of Conduct for Ministers by his handling of the sale of an interest in a small investment property in downtown Ottawa. The next day the Minister, who had been away on April 13, raised a matter of privilege, claiming that I had used distorted information and unsubstantiated innuendo in order to damage his reputation.

Last week, Mr. Speaker, you upheld my right to ask the original question, although you warned that Members should be careful not to abuse the absolute right of privilege that they enjoy in this House. I accept your ruling and will heed your caution. After some reflection and consultation, however, I should like to clear up any misunderstanding I may have caused about the Minister's action.

Before raising my question in April, I had reviewed the public documents on file in the Ottawa Registry Office and in the office of the Assistant Deputy Registrar General, or ADRG, the official responsible for overseeing the Code of Conduct for Ministers, as well as providing some advance notice of my question to the Minister's office. I tried to reach the Minister by phone, but he was in Toronto and not available.

Had I spoken directly to the ADRG, he might have informed me that the Minister had informed the ADRG before selling his interest in the Ottawa property and had received written assurance from this official that the Minister's transaction was in compliance with the Code of Conduct. This letter was not in the public file relating to the Minister's compliance with the code when I consulted it. Once the Minister had made the letter public on April 14, there could be no question that he had sought to comply with the code and was in compliance with the code with relation to the Ottawa transaction.

With hindsight, it is clear that any question to be raised in this matter should either be with the Code of Conduct itself or with its interpretation by the responsible official, the Assistant Deputy Registrar General. I remain convinced that the Code of Conduct for Ministers needs to be tightened up and made enforceable, and that one area that should be reviewed is that of transactions which might be viewed as commercial. These, however, are matters that should be raised with the Government, not with an individual Minister.

I therefore wish to acknowledge that in connection with the Ottawa transaction, the Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport did act honourably and did ensure that he was in compliance with the Code of Conduct for Ministers as it now stands. I hope this statement will help to set the record straight, and I wish to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your help in this matter.

Hon. Otto Jelinek (Minister of State (Fitness and Amateur Sport)): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) for the statement he just made. I take it that somewhere therein there is an apology, and I accept that apology. Therefore, I consider the matter in this regard closed, and I hope that in the process all of us have learned a bit of a lesson.

Mr. Speaker: I think it is appropriate for the Chair to say that of course the whole matter has given the Chair a great deal of difficulty. I think it is also appropriate to say to the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre (Mr. Cassidy) and to the Minister, on behalf of all Hon. Members, that the Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre is to be commended for having returned to the House and having made a statement, and that the Hon. Minister is to be commended for having accepted it graciously in the best traditions of this place. I thank both Hon. Members.