

Business of the House

stand one another and to work efficiently in the best interests of our fellow citizens.

[English]

Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I believe it is essential for the country and for taxpayers generally, and particularly for those hundreds of thousands of taxpayers who will be taken off the tax rolls if this bill passes—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):—that the present uncertainty concerning the fate of the tax reform bill be brought to an end as soon as possible.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I think all members of the House are aware that business decisions are pending throughout Canada, awaiting passage of this bill, that capital investment is being delayed until this bill is passed, that budget formulations are being made on the assumption that this bill will pass, that the accounting systems of most businesses, particularly those whose fiscal years have already begun and will end in the period covered by the bill, are being adversely affected by the failure of Parliament to come to grips with the situation.

I need not cite any greater authority on uncertainty than the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield). Last February he was complaining in a speech that the government's alleged failure to announce decisions on tax reform was having an unsettling effect on the economy. This is what he said:

It is this aspect of uncertainty about our economy that tax legislation could go a long way to clearing up.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): This bill has been studied and digested more thoroughly than any other piece of legislation which has come before this Parliament or any other Parliament I have known. It has been suggested from the other side that it should be withdrawn.

Mr. Baldwin: No.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): What chaos that would produce, with business not knowing whether to rely on the present taxation law or to rely on a future taxation law, having already prepared itself to operate on the basis of a future taxation law.

• (3:00 p.m.)

The Leader of the Official Opposition and his House leader, the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin), have put to the House and the government the proposition that the tax bill be split. How ought it to be split, Mr. Speaker? Technically it would be a nightmare to do so.

Mr. Bell: It already is a nightmare.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): Parliament and the Committee of the Whole have had a very full debate to this date consisting of 37 days, 12 days on second reading and 25 in Committee of the Whole.

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

Might I clarify a statement made by the Leader of the Opposition. To my knowledge and from advice I have received I can tell the House that the bill was distributed to the House by the distribution office on July 12.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Baldwin: That was the version in Chinese.

An hon. Member: Another of those cabinet leaks.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): The hon. member would not know that because he was on vacation. The bill has been discussed in Committee of the Whole on the basis of an interparty agreement among the House leaders. All of its major aspects have been debated, such as personal exemptions, the capital gains tax, corporate income, the way the legislation affects the farming community, the problem of the basic herd and so on.

Mr. Baldwin: We have a basic herd on the other side of the House.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): All of these major aspects of the bill have been thoroughly canvassed on second reading and debated in Committee of the Whole. Surely the time has now come, after almost two months of debate in this House, for Parliament to express itself on the bill.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): After all, democracy means debate—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):—but democracy also means the taking of decisions after debate. No member of the House would pretend that this bill is a perfect instrument.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister has only ten minutes in which to make his speech and it has become very difficult for any member of the House, including the Chair, to follow what the minister is saying.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): This parliament, Mr. Speaker, must pronounce itself on this bill. The people will also decide. The government, of course, will in due course be accountable to the people. But what the members on this side cannot accept is accountability for the uncertainty that the opposition is attempting to thrust upon this Parliament. Our responsibility is to try to persuade Parliament to bring this uncertainty to a close.

I want to issue a challenge to the opposition. I want the opposition to take a position on this bill and on some of the individual clauses of the bill. Let them vote against those clauses they do not like, but let them allow the bill to come to a vote so that the positions of both sides of the House be made clear.

Despite the rhetoric used by members on the other side of the House, this motion is not brought under Standing Order 33 or under the closure procedure. This motion falls under the rules providing for the allocation of time, Standing Orders 75A, 75B and 75C.