

*Point of Order—Mr. Cossitt*

[English]

**Mr. Collenette:** Madam Speaker, I would ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

[Translation]

**Madam Speaker:** The questions enumerated by the parliamentary secretary have been answered. Shall the remaining questions be allowed to stand?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

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● (1510)

[English]

**POINT OF ORDER**

MR. COSSITT—QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Tom Cossitt (Leeds-Grenville):** Madam Speaker, I rise to refer to two particular matters with regard to answering questions on the order paper. The first matter I would like to refer to deals with question No. 15 which has now stood on the order paper for three years and four months.

**Mr. Paproski:** Shame.

**Mr. Cossitt:** It asks a very simple question to this effect: how much money has Martin Goldfarb and Goldfarb Associates and Consultants received from the government for conducting government polls? This question has been on the order paper for three years and four months and has not yet been answered.

The Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) assured this House a few days ago that on Wednesday of this week, and possibly later next week, he will table information about certain government polls. I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary to assure this House that this question concerning Martin Goldfarb will either be answered at the same time on Wednesday, the same day—because after all he has had three years and four months of notice—or whether the Minister of Justice will include it in his answer.

To quote an old phrase, “Belly up to the bar, boys”, it seems to me that with Goldfarb it is “Belly up to the trough and dig into the public funds”. I think that it is time the public knew how much money—and it is a lot of money—is going to this enterprise, which is really the chief pollster of the Liberal Party of Canada.

The other point which I would like to raise, Madam Speaker, is with regard to the parliamentary secretary who has been widely quoted by the news media that he would consider or suggest that members be limited to ten or possibly 12 questions on the order paper. Such a move would have the effect of muzzling any member from asking a question if such a proposal were adopted, and I would like to know whether or not it is government policy. After all, if any member of this House were to put ten questions on the order paper, there is nothing in the rules to indicate that they must be answered and, by

leaving the questions on the order paper unanswered, under this proposal the government could simply put a member in the position where he could never put another written question on the order paper.

If this is the policy of a government which says that it is in favour of freedom of information, then I think we should know about it, because it is a serious breach of the rights of members. If the hon. parliamentary secretary has been misquoted, then I think now is the time to tell the House that he has been misquoted. If he should perhaps be speaking on his own behalf, rather than on the government's behalf, then I would contend under this point of order that, because he is the member who answers questions on the order paper in the House on behalf of the government, it is very difficult for him to dissociate himself from that function and to speak privately, and therefore the position from which he makes his utterances should be qualified.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I have two very brief points. The parliamentary secretary said, according to these publicized remarks, that the cost of questions on the order paper was between \$100 and \$1,000 per question per member, and that this was costing the taxpayer too much money. I do not think that it costs too much money to let the public know what is going on when it is with regard to legitimate information, especially when some of the answers are not worth \$100, \$1,000, but only ten cents, if that.

On my final point, Madam Speaker, I hope we will not be treated to a lecture by the parliamentary secretary on percentages. We usually receive such comments from him as, “We've answered 80 per cent of this member's questions, we've answered 70 per cent of this member's questions, or 75 per cent of that member's questions. The government tries to make it sound as though it is gloriously serving this country when the actual truth is that it answers questions with either a non-answer, or only questions which will do no harm to the government. But for three years and four months it has neglected a question which it is literally afraid to answer.

**An hon. Member:** You guys can have him.

**Mr. Cossitt:** The hon. member sitting next to the parliamentary secretary can have his little jokes and asides, but I say that it is time that the members opposite stopped joking and said to their own government, “it is time we had some answers and freedom of information in this country”.

**Mr. D. M. Collenette (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council):** Madam Speaker, taking a cue from the hon. member for Leeds-Grenville (Mr. Cossitt) with regard to his closing remarks, I should say that the government has a freedom of information bill on the order paper, and we hope to proceed with it very soon. The Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) last week, I believe, made an excellent presentation in which he said that a certain number of polls would be released by the government this week. I will bring the hon. member's question No. 15. to the attention of the Minister of Justice.