

*Private Members' Business*

Is the decision that will be made by the caller on the particular weekend based on all the facts presented to them? Or has that decision been made as a result of what could be a very moving, a very powerful statement made by one individual over another?

We have heard some of the debate in this House. Some of the members have the most powerful arguments, the most powerful delivery. If we get into a passionate subject where life or death is involved we know what kind of arguments can be put forward. Because one is presented more passionately than the other, does that make that argument the right one and there can be no other conclusion but to vote for that particular person's point of view? "I will not even hear the other side. That guy was so good I am voting yes", or "I am voting no". It is a dangerous policy.

• (1155)

To secure freer votes Reform would release the government from demonstrating that it retains the confidence of the House except for those occasions when the House is asked to express itself on a formal confidence motion. Members in turn would be able to vote as they choose on any given issue secure in the knowledge they would not be subject to party discipline.

According to Reform these two practices would allow members to better represent their constituents, particularly when issues arise where constituents clearly indicate they do not support the member's party's position on that issue.

In the leader of the Reform Party's point of view when confronted with such a situation that member's choice is clear: "If push comes to shove in my view", says Mr. Manning, "the will of the constituents will prevail over my personal view or my party's view". Mr. Manning however then goes on to say: "I am not talking about turning members into a voting machine where all they do is go home on the weekend, count noses and come back here and stick up their hands. The relationship between a member and his constituents has to be one of dialogue".

Both the Prime Minister and our government House leader have indicated the government's desire to see more free votes in the House. What we have not done is to accept the Reform's interpretation of free votes. While not rejecting Reform's view completely, the Prime Minister and government House leader both have argued there are valid and longstanding reasons for the government to approach confidence from a more comprehensive perspective.

The Prime Minister for example has referred to the mandate given the House in the recent election: "This House is not a group of independents who have been elected on their own. We too are members of a party and we had a program. It is the red book and it will be implemented".

That is what we stand for here as a group. It is not the individual vote; it is the collective. It is the understanding of what we believe to be in the best interests of our constituents, of our riding, of our province, of our country. That is what we are doing here.

This motion cannot be allowed to undermine that Canadian democratic process. I am sure the people who elected me would not approve.

**Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest):** Mr. Speaker, when talking about freer votes in this debate it is important to keep in mind the fact that when the pendulum swings it does not always have to swing to either extreme.

What we are looking for in this Parliament and the single factor that would probably distinguish this Parliament thus far from the last Parliament, is that there is a great deal more balance. The government has gone out of its way to try to provide that balance and provide input in government from opposition and from the Liberal backbenches as well.

I am reminded particularly of the opening days of this session. So many of us were brand new to this House. We were very nervous about what we were doing, myself included. We had the opportunity to engage in a couple of very important debates over quite a few days. It gave us the sense of belonging and participating and an opportunity to actually do something.

Here we are with this notion of freer votes. Before we talk about the mechanics of exactly what free votes or freer votes are, we should look at a couple of things. One would be our party's history in this House.

As the hon. member who spoke to this motion just a moment ago so rightly pointed out, it is somewhat paradoxical that we are talking about the need for freer votes yet since we have been in this House all of us have voted together.

Basically all of us voted together from all parties. That has to be because we were all elected on the particular platforms with the particular ideology we were promoting. It is only reasonable to assume we would follow through as our ideology was presented in Parliament and vote according to however it was we said we would when we were elected.

• (1200)

It is interesting also, in conversation with others who have been in this House much longer than I, that very often a vote when in opposition is opposed. The role of opposition is to oppose the government, to be a check and balance to government to try and ensure that government thinks through all of its policies.

This government has a very substantial majority and that substantial majority flows through to the committees. The essence of this place is that we as members of Parliament have the ability to try, as others have said before, to influence the way