

*Government Orders*

At present, the Standing Orders of the House allow the opposition about 25 days a year, but the government proposes reducing this to 20. Opposition days enable a member in co-operation with his party to choose a subject of interest to the riding he represents, a particular region of the country or specific groups. For example, these opposition days have given us the opportunity to deal with issues concerning people in the Atlantic, the West, fishermen, farmers or education, to give only a few examples.

Mr. Speaker, you well know my interest in issues related to science and technology. You also know that science and technology hardly receive the attention they deserve. Many experts attribute this lack to the fact that we have been unable to develop a scientific culture in Canada; that is a culture that favours science, education, knowledge and the development of our human resources.

The reason is clear. Because we are very rich in natural resources, we were never forced to develop this scientific culture. In short, education and research are not priorities if we can always cut another tree or dig or export more oil to solve our balance of payments.

Several times in recent years, Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has used opposition days to raise issues of science and technology. These opposition days have made it possible for us in the opposition to ensure that the House deals with these important questions. On March 14, 1991, I presented a motion to remind Canadians of the Prime Minister's promise to double Canadian spending for research and development.

Mr. Speaker, we had a good debate that day. Many members told me that they appreciated the opportunity to deal with these issues. Also, I received many calls and letters from Canadians who share my interest for these matters. They told me that they also appreciated the debate.

Nevertheless, the government wants to reduce the number of opposition days, Mr. Speaker. This means that the opposition will have less opportunity to choose the questions to debate and these issues would not be raised if we had to depend on the government.

[*English*]

Similarly, the Conservative government's proposal will reduce the throne speech debate by two days and the

budget debate for two days. Canadians who are not members of Parliament may not know that it is not always easy to participate in a budget debate. There is always a long list of members who wish to speak and there is often not enough time for all members to do so.

Reducing the length of the budget debate by two days will of course mean that far fewer members of Parliament will be able to participate in the debate. And what is more important to our constituents than the budget?

I cannot figure it out. I thought that my primary role as a member of Parliament was to come here to Ottawa to this House of Commons and try to articulate the views and needs of my constituents in debate. I was to question the government and hold it accountable in debates. Yet, with the Conservative government's proposal, fewer members of Parliament will have the opportunity to ask questions or to intervene in debates.

The Minister of Finance, who is sitting opposite, just asked me how I will find out what is on the minds of my constituents if we do not have more time away from this House. Well, I can answer the Minister of Finance that I do not need more time off to find out the views of my constituents on the various subjects on which I speak in this House. I have plenty of time under the current arrangements to be in my constituency, to meet with constituents in my constituency office, to organize public meetings, to send out questionnaires. There are many resources at our disposal.

I do know that it is often difficult to participate in debate in this House because the occasion is not provided under the rules of the House or because there is a shortage of time. What the government proposes to do is shorten further the time available for members of Parliament to participate in various debates such as that on the budget as I have just explained.

I want to end where I began my comments by referring to the recommendations of the McGrath report of 1985. The authors, all members of Parliament who were elected to this House in the 1984 general election, some new members and some experienced members, were all concerned with restoring confidence in the House of Commons. The key to it, they said, was to enhance the involvement of the private member of Parliament.