

will prejudice discussions and make it harder for Canada and Quebec to reach an agreement before they even start.

[English]

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to think it is a pleasure to speak to this motion today and if I begin to speak rather quickly during my presentation it is because the government has invoked closure; I must hurry as usual to get through before something else happens on the other side.

This is not the first time I have spoken on the bill. It is a very important bill. The three most substantial bills for my office as far as public interest especially in this spring sitting of Parliament are the MP pension plan, Bill C-41, the sentencing bill, and Bill C-68, the gun control bill. Those three have invoked more interest in Canadian papers and in my riding than any other legislation the government has talked about or has brought in.

• (1605)

The Canadian public should know that today closure was invoked on those three bills to stifle debate in the House. Those three bills the Canadian people think are most important have now been allocated only a few hours of debate before they have been passed and rammed through Parliament.

Before I get to the substance of the bill, people may think these bills could be dealt with in committee. Maybe that would be a good place to air them and put forward amendments.

On first reading of Bill C-64, the employment equity bill, I was not allowed to bring amendments because they were in English only and could not be accepted. Then only five minutes of debate was allowed per amendment, which meant often I was not allowed to speak. When it was brought to the House, closure was invoked like it was done with the three bills. When the committee has a bill as controversial as the pension bill, it does not have to invoke closure, it just will not let any witnesses appear. That will take care of the debate.

Perhaps a private members' bill would be a good way to get democracy to the forefront and on to the front burner. People should have been in committee the other day to see the look on the face of the member for Hamilton-Wentworth when Bill C-224 was deep sixed by the Liberal majority on the committee, never again to see the light of day because it did not want to see it there.

It is very difficult to get a point of view across and it is disappointing to see the government, which campaigned on open government, more access for the Canadian people, invoking different types of closure in different ways to stifle meaningful debate. It is very discouraging.

In speaking to this block of motions before us on the bill, I want to reiterate concerns of my constituents. I could read from

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endless supplies of letters I have received from people concerned about the bill, about the previous pension plan and so on. They are very angry.

Of the three bills I mentioned earlier this bill is the one that really peaks their interest. Because we cannot have meaningful debate in here the government will not allow it to go on as it should.

The last time I was on my feet speaking to this bill on previous reading I offered to debate any member of the House anywhere in Canada at any time in a public forum on pension plans. We cannot seem to get Liberal members to debate it here. They are not very proud of it. There are not many speakers from the government side. No one accepted the challenge because they realize the amount of gas to keep their cars running out behind the theatre to make their quick getaway would cause some kind of global warming.

No one will debate. No one wants to debate in a public forum. No one on the Liberal side is proud of this legislation. They will hang their heads and pass it later on. It is really too bad. I believe the government is running scared on Bill C-41, Bill C-68, the pension bill, Bill C-64, the employment equity bill. It does not want to debate any of those. It does not want to debate anything like that because it realizes those are the things Canadians will get upset about. It hopes to slide these through and somehow keep people from knowing the truth about this pension plan.

I want to make perfectly clear for my constituents that I will have to opt out of the pension plan. It is a shame really. I sent out 40,000 questionnaires earlier this year and 85 per cent of the people who responded on this issue said they think members of Parliament should have a pension plan. There is nothing wrong with a pension plan, only make it the same as the pension plan in the private sector. They supported me. A pension plan for MPs is not a bad deal, but they said I should not dare support the pension plan proposed by the government.

That is too bad. Most members on both sides of the House have families. I have a wife and four kids. I like to support them and do my part in family finances. However, when the Liberals deliberately put together a package they know no fair minded person can support, it is a shame. They will force people out of the pension plan to make sure there is nothing available. This shows their motive, especially when speaking to Motions Nos. 1 and 6, the idea of opting in or opting out of this plan for future parliamentarians.

• (1610)

In a sense the Liberals are hoping to invoke closure on this issue even into the next election. They do not want to talk about this. It is a fait accompli. One must be part of this pension plan to run for Parliament next time. They are even trying to stifle the debate on the next round of parliamentarians, which is really disgusting.