

Privilege

and I will listen very attentively to the Chair's ruling on this question of privilege.

I must say that I was not aware of the situation, but I immediately and instinctively thought that we do not make distinctions between members of the House in matters such as this one.

[*English*]

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, to be very brief on this issue, I am not aware of the details and certainly would want to have more information before being absolutely definitive.

It is the nature of these kinds of situations that there is limited space and limited ability for people to observe. In this case, of course, we are talking about a conference that is closed and there is no opportunity for anybody to participate.

The way we have handled that is to have representation from the parties in the House based on the proportion of their membership in the House, rather the same way we do with any delegated operation in the House, be it a committee and so on.

We have always had a problem on how to deal with Independents. The question is one of wanting to be fair to Independents but by the same token recognizing that it would be equally inappropriate to give Independents an opportunity not available to every member. If you open things up to every member, is it possible to have some delegation from this institution as opposed to everyone in the institution participate?

Without knowing the details of what is involved, I would humbly suggest that it might be something like that. Certainly, I will undertake on behalf of my party to examine and ensure that there was no overt attempt to exclude anybody by virtue of them not being a member of an established party in the House. That, I am quite certain, is not the intent, but I will look into it and inform the Chair if I find out differently.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alex Kindy (Calgary Northeast): Mr. Speaker, I want to support the question of privilege raised by the member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead.

I believe that members elected to the House of Commons are here to represent their constituents, and they all have the same rights whether or not they belong to a political party.

I think it is inconceivable that a member sitting as an independent should be subjected to flagrant discrimination. Mr. Speaker, I hope you will take these points under consideration. I know you have excellent judgment and I hope you will respond to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead.

M. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I wish to support the position of the member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead although I have, as a member of the Charest Committee, been accredited for the congress.

We were 15 members on the Charest Committee, but the issues we dealt with concern all the hon. members of this House. Of course, the independent members were not appointed by the three parties as members of the Committee.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, and also because of the fact that there are so many people from the media and so many provincial members and because of the importance of this issue affecting not only the members of Parliament from the province of Quebec but all Canadians, I hope that the Chair and the government House leader will consult each other and give their support to the position of the member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead.

[*English*]

Mr. David Barrett (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to repeat comments made by other members on the matter of principle and privilege, but what is important in this particular instance is the fact that access to the meetings may become an issue which detracts from the debate itself that is taking place.

If the member feels that he was denied access, that indeed could be misinterpreted by the Canadian public in terms of access to process, which is already a question relative to the accord itself.

I urge that the member and any member who wishes, as a duly elected member of this Chamber, to be present at any meetings that are open to any elected person be given absolute access. Without that we develop a side issue that becomes a separate story that does damage to