

*Points of Order*

I am not sure that we serve the public altogether well in that context because of how it appears to those in the galleries or those watching television. We have this interchange and then sometimes wonder out loud why it is that politicians are held in disrepute and disrespect, when it is a small wonder, given the kind of exchanges we too frequently have.

That being said, I am certainly more than prepared and anxious to engage in discussions with colleagues on the other side of the House to see if, in fact, we could not arrange some *ad hoc* rules, instructions, suggestions that we might put to the Chair in terms of how we might manage Question Period in a way that meets the understandable and appropriate desires of the opposition: to have the time and ability for their members to stand up and question members of the government on their respective responsibility, and to recognize the equally legitimate concerns, from the government's perspective, of the ability to defend oneself, if you will.

I do not know how these discussions might come out and I do not want to prejudge them. If it were to come out to a circumstance where the Chair received generalized instructions from both sides of the House to cut off those who abuse the preamble or the set-up to a question and, equally, to cut off those government ministers who respond with too much verbosity, frankly, I would not quarrel with that at all.

Let me repeat that I understand the frustration of the House Leader of the Official Opposition, and I am more than willing to engage in discussions to see if we cannot find some satisfactory resolution.

**Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing):** Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, we are all, of course, moved with compassion for the concerns that the minister has for slights made against him during Question Period, but I have one or two brief points to add.

It is the New Democratic Party, and sometimes the Independents, who often feel the brunt of too much time being taken by others in Question Period. I just want to point out that concern. However, it is clearly everyone's responsibility to be as succinct as we can, both in questions and in answers, and I would like to contribute whatever my party can to the discussions which will achieve that.

I would also like to thank the Deputy Speaker, who today found the opportunity to give a fourth question to the New Democratic Party, and that sometimes gets us through Question Period satisfactorily. It is a difficult question but it is important for all of us to participate.

**Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the non-cabinet members of my party, I would like to join in this discussion.

I heard the NDP spokesperson say that it was his party that suffered when preambles were long. Let me tell him that it is government members who frequently get no questions even though they represent the majority of members in this Chamber. If we could indeed come to some collective agreement that would enable us to shorten the preamble and shorten the responses, that would enable us to increase the number of questioners and questions asked in Question Period, that would be strongly supported by my members in the anticipation that they would have somewhat of an increased opportunity to participate in that process, as well. They would like it; they have a hunger for it; and brevity is the route to the solution. I am pleased to see so much accord, and I am sure our caucus would unanimously support that kind of a move.

**Mr. Dingwall:** Mr. Speaker, I will not be long in my intervention.

I guess we are talking, to a certain extent, with regard to the purposes of Question Period. Of course, the purpose of Question Period for the Official Opposition has always been to elicit information from government members. It is not to score cheap political points, as alluded to by the member opposite. He must be referring to some third party or independent members, but he certainly cannot attribute that to the Official Opposition.

I hope that as we proceed in the coming days and weeks, perhaps the Chair, through his able assistants, will be able to provide us with some statistical information about the timing of the questions and the timing of the responses. I think this will be helpful to any discussion that we might have.

However, I wish to point out to the Government House Leader that we are prepared to examine some of the suggestions that he has made. But I cannot let it be said by the chief government Whip that it has the largest body of members of Parliament who do not have an opportunity to ask questions. The purpose of Question