

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I will allow the extension of time, but I will not allow the questions and comments period.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is there unanimous consent?

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, all that the minister is asking is that we revert to the way we were dealing with the matter earlier. I would ask that we seek unanimous consent to have the minister complete his remarks with a 20-minute speech—as a matter of fact a few moments extra if he wishes—and then the usual 10-minute question and comment period.

I seek unanimous consent to allow the minister to proceed that way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Members have heard the suggestion. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Fontaine: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I am sorry.

Mr. Fulton: I rise on a point of order. Could you perhaps put it again, Mr. Speaker? It is a government member who is blocking unanimous consent for his own minister to speak.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Fontaine: I said “no”, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The hon. member for Okanagan—Shuswap.

Mr. Lyle Dean MacWilliam (Okanagan—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, in preparing to speak today on this particular piece of legislation it was very tempting indeed to wander in here with a volley of criticism toward this minister and this government in respect of this particular bill.

It is so easy to criticize this government for the duplicitous nature of this legislation. In looking up that definition, duplicitous means double meaning, deceitfulness, appearing to be that which is not.

Far be it from me to suggest that the minister himself is duplicitous, or that this government is duplicitous. Certainly, in the eyes of Canadians, this legislation is indeed duplicitous.

Rather than a tirade of concern about this legislation, I would rather go into some specific details and show precisely where it falls down. Since the Hon. Tom McMillan was environment minister—and that was some time ago—this government has been promising strong environmental legislation and a strong review process that would be entrenched in law. Instead what we have is a weak and hollow shell of a bill. It has more holes in it as my colleague said than a piece of Swiss cheese. It is weaker in fact than the current guidelines within which the minister must work. It is a step backward in terms of an environmental review process, not a step forward.

• (1520)

It appears that government members are intent on ramming through this bill before the accompanying regulations can be drafted. One has to ask why. I think the reason is very clear, that they want this bill in place before the important decisions have to be made in terms of the specifics of the regulation. They want to leave it vague. They want to duck the issue in terms of a hard-nosed piece of legislation that could be brought down with respect to the environmental review process.

For example, cabinet decisions are exempted from this legislation. This would mean, for example, that a cabinet decision to cut public transit would be exempt.

Members from British Columbia are very familiar with the effect of having too much control by cabinet over these kinds of sensitive issues. Sometime ago, for example, the agricultural land reserve in British Columbia was put in place. There was a professional body of about 80 individuals called the Environmental Land Use Secretariat. This body was put into place to police those kinds of decisions; but the government of the day at that time, the Social Credit government of the day, decided to disband those individuals and decided that cabinet in fact would be the final answer as to whether a piece of land remained in the reserve or without.

We have seen the impact of playing politics with sensitive decisions in that manner. Certainly members from British Columbia have seen the weakness in having