

Business of the House

● (1510)

Mr. Speaker: I think Hon. Members are aware that the Chair has been very careful on points of order and questions of privilege to hear all those who are involved in the dispute or the complaint, and to hear as well other Hon. Members who wish to intervene. In the present case the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) is responding to the Hon. Member for Windsor West (Mr. Gray). The Prime Minister has the floor as he is entitled to have.

Mr. Mulroney: It is a very, very simple point, Mr. Speaker. My hon. friend said that I had said no to western farmers. I said no such thing. My hon. friend is the one who, as reported at page 6401 of *Hansard*, said "It is a no, a firm no." In other words, his interpretation gave rise to his own suggestion that I had said no to western farmers when I had said exactly the opposite.

If the objection is to the word "fabrication", if that is unparliamentary, I would happily withdraw it in favour of the word "invention" because I made no such comment at all. I would be happy to follow your directive, Mr. Speaker, in this regard.

Mr. Rossi: Did he say "fabrication" or not?

Mr. Mazankowski: He withdrew it.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Windsor West has risen on a point of order and quite properly pointed out to the House that the word "fabrication" has in the past been found to be unparliamentary. The Hon. Member for Windsor West, who is a scholar on procedural matters, would also point out that these words must be looked at in the context in which they were spoken. The Chair has not had the opportunity in the last few minutes to check *Hansard* for that particular citation.

However, the Right Hon. Prime Minister got up and said "I withdraw the word 'fabrication'", and I think that that ends it.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

WEEKLY STATEMENT

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I would like permission to ask the usual question of the Government House Leader as to the business he intends to call during the coming week.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, in order to accommodate the Opposition we will be calling Bills C-42 and C-56 tomorrow. Monday will be an allotted day. Presuming that we conclude the second reading stage of Bill C-42, we will call Bill C-56 on Tuesday. Perhaps we will get into Bill C-56 tomorrow. However, that will be the order of business.

POINT OF ORDER

METHOD OF PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS—MR. SPEAKER'S RULING

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council (Mr. Lewis) has been patiently awaiting, for quite some time, the Chair's comments on a matter which he raised on March 23 last. The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary, on a point of order, questioned the current practice with respect to the presentation of petitions. In particular, he pointed out a number of instances where petitions were certified by the Clerk of Petitions and then presented to the House some weeks or months later. He claimed that a lengthy lapse of time between the certification of a petition and its presentation in the House denied those Canadians who were petitioning the opportunity for speedy redress of their grievances. It also, he claimed, denied the Government the right to reply promptly.

So that all Hon. Members and the public will understand, under the rules of this place when a petition is presented either by an Hon. Member rising to his or her feet to present it, or by filing it at the Table, the Government is now required under the rules to reply to that petition in so many days. It is important that all Hon. Members and the public which is watching this understand that because that is a key ingredient of these remarks.

The Hon. Parliamentary Secretary is raising an extremely legitimate complaint here. Any Canadian who signs a petition would not expect that several months would elapse from the date the petition is first signed until a response is forthcoming. While a delay of several weeks is potentially required in order to allow for the collection of signatures, the transmittal to Ottawa, the certification by the Clerk of Petitions, the presentation in the House, and the response by the Government, most Canadians would agree that delays of some seven or eight months, as pointed out by the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary, are difficult to justify.

The second point raised by the Parliamentary Secretary dealt with the presentation of petitions by Members other than the Member who had the petition certified. As Hon. Members will know, before a petition can be presented it must be certified at the Table. He claimed that this practice would be misleading because when Members from across the country were presenting petitions the implication could be drawn that a particular issue was of more widespread concern to Canadians than possibly was the case.

[*Translation*]

By way of response to these two points let me first quote Standing Order 106(1) which states:

Prior to presentation, the Clerk of Petitions shall examine all petitions, and in order to be presented, they must be certified correct as to form and content by the said Clerk.

There is no specific mention in this Standing Order of any requirement to present a petition within a specific time frame, only the point that "prior to presentation" it must be certified.