

*Government Orders*

That was what was proposed. I should say that leading up to that, I had asked for a little bit of research to be done. It was done by the Library of Parliament. The research was on what other jurisdictions around the world do. What do other democracies do? How long do other legislatures and parliaments and congresses and so on sit in other countries? It was an interesting piece of research.

Australia sits an average of 66 days a year. Its parliament sits 66 days a year; 89 per cent of the bills introduced by the government are passed, for an average of about 14 per day of government business.

Denmark sits an average of 106 days a year; 89 per cent of government bills are passed, for an average of seven bills per day of government business.

Canada sits, although the calendar provides for 175 days, but because of unscheduled non-sittings, an average of 155 days a year over the last 10 years. Only 56 per cent of government bills are passed, for an average of one bill per government day of business.

France sits 149 days. Western Germany sits 17 days. Japan sits 43 days. The Netherlands sits 100 days. New Zealand sits 100 days. Norway sits 180 days.

There is the first of that list, countries that actually sit more days than Canada. Spain sits for 88 days. Sweden sits for 134 days. The United Kingdom sits for 170 days. There is a unitary state where they have two levels of government. They pass an average of two bills per government sitting day, compared to the one per sitting day in Canada, so they get twice as much legislation through than we do.

The United States sits 144 days. We sit longer than the U.S. Congress. The European Community sits 65 days. In other words, only Norway and the United Kingdom actually sit longer than Canada's parliament in terms of sitting days per year.

If somebody could demonstrate that in fact we have better laws, that we are more democratic than the rest of the democratic world, then I think a case could be made for even sitting longer. But with a country this size, this diverse, to suggest the best thing we could do is keep members of Parliament here in Ottawa as many days a year as possible is absurd. It is an absurd proposal. We

know that our provincial governments, many of which pass just as many pieces of legislation as we do, do not sit anywhere near as long as we do. Everywhere from New Brunswick at 42, to Manitoba at 98. Quebec is at 74, Ontario is at 84 days a year. Nova Scotia sits 62 days a year.

In the context of this national constitutional debate we are having, members of the legislative assemblies, national assemblies, provincial parliaments, are in their constituencies talking to their constituents, interacting with them.

• (1600 )

Members of Parliament, who have a national mandate, are not able to be in their constituencies with the same frequency, with the same opportunities for interacting. Is that really something we should applaud, underline, repeat, particularly when we have examples of other legislatures around the world which manage to do more business in less time? If somebody can demonstrate that they are less democratic than we are and that somehow their people are worse off than we are, then I would like to hear those arguments.

In proposing the rule change for one week off a month, basically we will be sitting the same number of hours; more, as a matter of fact, because there will be an additional hour a day added to the calendar. So, effectively, on an hourly basis we will not be sitting less.

The new calendar will give more time to members of Parliament, particularly those from the more remote regions who cannot easily get to their constituencies and back in a two-day weekend. It will give them time to be with their constituents, to interact in a manner that Canadians are increasingly demanding.

Some have suggested that fewer Question Periods are somehow going to significantly weaken our democratic system. I offered to extend Question Period time a little bit, but that was not received.

I do not want to get into this debate too far, but I think it would be instructive to have, perhaps, some independent observers, perhaps from political science departments, to reflect on the degree to which Question Period helps or hurts our democracy and democratic institutions.