

Point of Order

The answer is yes, we will work very closely with the provinces to try to ensure that this does not happen.

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POINTS OF ORDER**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I think my point of order may be a bit of a hybrid between privilege and order but I will leave that up to you to advise the House.

At 12.43 p.m. today, the bells in the chamber and throughout all the buildings on Parliament Hill began to ring. As members would know, in the upper left-hand corner of the television sets both here and in the lobby, in members offices and in other areas of the precincts of the Hill, there is a digital clock which gives members and the public some idea of how long the bells are going to ring before a vote is taken.

I was, in fact, when the bells began to ring, in the middle of a conversation with representatives of the Canadian Human Rights Commission. I turned on the television, saw that there were 29 minutes and something available and carried on with the conversation only to find that the bells stopped. I subsequently saw a voting procedure begin.

The reason I think that there is clearly either a point of order or a question of privilege and that we have some options is that if we are going to continue having that digital display advising members how long it is until we vote, there will have to be a clear procedure as to whether or not it is a 15-minute bell, a 30-minute bell or something else.

Why I say it is possibly a hybrid between a question of privilege and a point of order is that perhaps there was what might be described as a hybrid political relationship between the Liberal Whip and the Government Whip in this situation in their joint desire to quickly pass the GST legislation.

If you could give me some idea as to whether or not that digital clock is going to continue to be there, perhaps we could add a little red or green light so we will know what has been agreed to by Whips. If there is agreement, then a green light would come on. If it just sort of a loosey-goosey situation, perhaps a red light or a

blinking light or an orange light could come on so the members have a better idea of what is happening.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I am not convinced that a legitimate vote was taken just prior to one o'clock because members who were in committee or elsewhere on the Hill were, to the best of our knowledge and ability, determining when to come to the House based on that digital clock. I think my privileges and the privileges of other members were damaged and perhaps usurped, and I look forward to your ruling.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I have never heard such nonsense in my life. To re-establish the facts, the facts are that when the House is in debate, we get eight hours of debate at second reading before we revert back to 10 minute speeches.

What the NDP was doing this morning was trying to cut honest debate, good debate, opposing debate on GST by having the bells ring for one-half hour when, indeed, the floor had been given to the Liberals and should have been given to the Liberals because it was our turn. We want to debate this bill. We do not want to waste time as the NDP are doing.

Second, I take strong exception to the New Democrats not getting their act together and not operating within the rules of this House. We will continue to want to debate this bill to the utmost and to defeat this bill, if possible, but we will not play without rules, we will play within the rules.

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I think the issue is really quite simple. If the NDP and the member who spoke and brought this to our attention would read the rule book, they will find that the rules are expressed in terms of the maximum amount of time until a vote. The clock on the television reflects the maximum amount of time available until the vote. The rules do not deal with minimums. We have had several votes in this session of Parliament already where we moved rather quickly, within a minute or two from the commencement of bells, for the kinds of reasons which the Whip for the Official Opposition lays on the table.

This is supposed to be a place where great debates take place on the great issues of the time and the dilatory \$5-million waste last week of taxpayers' money in this Chamber by the NDP is just something that responsible members of Parliament will not tolerate any more than they have to.