

Privilege—Mr. Gillies

whether or not the minister will require the Canadian Wildlife Service to consult interested groups such as the Canadian Ornamental Pheasant and Game Bird Association before recommending any changes; and can he assure the House, if there are any changes, that they will be in keeping with, and not more stringent than, policies adopted by other signatories to the migratory birds convention?

Mr. Fleming: Mr. Speaker, as parliamentary secretary I do not, of course, decide policy, but I will certainly take the hon. member's representation to the minister. The only caution I would present, if I may, is that there may be occasions when Canada would be pleased to be a leader in protecting endangered species, and therefore to say that we would never do anything more than another country would not be the traditional policy of the Canadian Wildlife Service, which has an excellent reputation.

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PRIVILEGE

MR. GILLIES—STATEMENTS OF MINISTERS MADE OUTSIDE HOUSE

Mr. James Gillies (Don Valley): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I want to raise a question of privilege which has been raised many times before and I hope Your Honour will take it most seriously, as I am sure you will. It relates to the fact that yesterday the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie) at a press conference put forth a document which in many respects is supplementary to the paper "An Energy Strategy for Canada" which was released two years ago. It was a most important document which was followed by statements, many of which can be challenged, many of which are incorrect, statements which should be questioned in the House. There should be an opportunity for the people of Canada to know what the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources has in mind in terms of energy for this country, but there was no statement made on motions.

With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, I think all of us know that parliament is in grave difficulty in this country. People are concerned about parliament and whether it is relevant to the governing of this nation. The role of parliamentarians is declining. Actions such as this, where parliamentarians are not given the privilege of examining, as they ought to examine, major policy statements of the government, do nothing but very seriously hurt parliament.

I urge, with all respect to Your Honour, that this government should go back to the practice which has been followed over the years, that when important statements are made, they are made in this House on motions so there can be appropriate examination of such statements. The privileges of all members of this parliament and of the people of Canada are really hurt by the procedure that is now being followed by the government, with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources

[Mr. Halliday.]

bringing forward a document which very substantially amends a major policy statement made just a couple of years ago.

Therefore, I wish to propose a motion in the following terms:

That the matter of the government's unwillingness to have statements by ministers on important documents be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections so that this matter can be examined in the context of what it is doing to erode the privileges of members of parliament and the people of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie) on the same question of privilege.

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak to this motion since I suggest it is based on a number of misconceptions. The hon. member said that this was an important document. I agree with him that it is an important document. But to go on to describe it as a major policy statement is, I think—

Mr. Gillies: It is an amendment to policy.

Mr. Gillespie: —overstating the point completely. It is a factual document. There are two documents dealing with an update of the oil and natural gas resources of Canada and with the oil sands and heavy oil prospects. It does not deal with any policy statement in the sense of recommended courses of action; it is strictly an informational document.

The second point I want to make is that the standing committee on national resources has a reference at the present time before it, "An Energy Strategy for Canada", and it is because the committee has that reference and is dealing with important energy questions that we thought it important to place this matter before the public so that it could be part of the committee's considerations.

I do not see how the hon. member can argue that these two documents, comprising hundreds of pages having to do with a great deal of technical and detailed information, are the sort of thing that one would want to respond to after perhaps half an hour's reading or even an hour's reading in some sort of debate on a statement on motions. Surely, if he wants to re-examine the important information contained in these documents, the best way is for the committee which is charged with the question of an energy strategy for Canada to receive it. I would also point out to the hon. member that I did not in any way meet with the press before I tabled those documents in the House. My officials gave a briefing to press officers, which is a great tradition of this House, but I did not meet with the press. I placed the documents before the House before I met with the press.

It seems to me there is one other point which we should not completely overlook. Yesterday was an opposition day, and I remember that in the past opposition members have been very unhappy at the government making a statement on motions which usurps—to use their term—a large piece of parliamentary time. I would think that it would not have been the sort of move which opposition members would have complimented us on had we taken that course. For all those reasons, Mr.