

Obviously the government has to make a decision as to whether it wants to continue to pursue the striking committee report, which I am advised is amendable in this House. Regardless of the standing order that says that we report only once per year, that report is not only debatable, it is amendable.

At any time the striking committee could meet. Whether it is a striking committee or a meeting of the Whips, they could meet to work out a new approach that perhaps deals in some way with the government's concern about its ability to drag bodies back in from the constituencies in order to ensure that committees function in the way that the government would like them to, while at the same time protecting our membership.

I think there are options available that have not been explored yet, Mr. Speaker, but I would hope that your ruling would come down reasonably soon and provide us with some new direction.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, members opposite will know that it is a longstanding practice of the House that members with an interest in committee meetings can attend these meetings.

With very few exceptions, members who come and who are not normally members of the committee have a chance to participate. There is nothing in the striking committee report that obviates that basic principle.

If there are 10 members who want to come to transport, that is certainly something they could do. What we are talking about in terms of striking committee report and the size of the standing committees of the House is simply how many votes need to be cast.

We are paying close attention to the proportionality of the House, whether we are talking about a large committee or a small committee. We are simply talking from our point of view about whether members have to sit to warm a chair because we do not believe that that was the intent of McGrath.

We thought the intent of McGrath was for members to be knowledgeable, to be consistent in their attendance and to provide the House with good advice.

The suggestion has been made that we engage in a debate. If the motion is moved at any time during Routine Proceedings after notice, there is a two-hour debate. If people filibuster, then it is simply transferred

to Government Orders and it has to be recalled as part of government business down the road. That is a very time consuming proposition for the House.

I make two suggestions to the members opposite. We might want to discuss it at the House leaders meeting later this day to see if we could come to a limited debate. If that is really what they want or if they want to filibuster the situation, it depends. We could go immediately to a division, which was my suggestion.

I would still like you, when I am done, to put that to the House. Is there unanimous consent for an immediate division on the principle? I think that would serve the House best in terms of getting on to resolve the problems that exist out there.

Mr. Speaker: This matter was raised some days ago, and I have reserved on it.

I will consider very carefully what was said and include the representations that I have heard in my report back to the House.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 28 petitions.

[Editor's Note: See today's Votes and Proceedings.]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Ross Harvey (Edmonton East): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour and in some sense the pleasure this morning to present a petition under Standing Order 36 signed by a total 346 residents—mostly of Edmonton, but of other points in Alberta as well—calling on Parliament to reaffirm the historic principles embodied in tax free status for the printed word by retaining the zero rate in the GST legislation and regulations.

Especially in this year of literacy, that would seem to be sound advice indeed for the government.