

and to the hon. members for Kingston and the Islands and for Churchill and for Calgary West for their contributions to this procedural debate.

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PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT

Mr. Stan Keyes (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, my question of privilege deals with the Standing Committee on Transport. I raise this matter now, based on the motion agreed to last week by the House pertaining to the standing committee on corporate affairs. That decision impacts directly on the point I want to make today.

My colleague from Ottawa—Vanier correctly pointed out, at page 18323 of *Hansard* for Tuesday, March 12, that the consumer and corporate affairs committee had not been convened for some time due to the resignation of the chairperson and had not met because there was no chair to preside.

I will spare the Chair the remaining details of that case. However I cite it for reasons of precedence because the next day, at page 18427 on Wednesday, March 13, the government Whip introduced a motion, agreed to by the House, that facilitated the committee's resurrection. In fact the Whip then noted the actual date and time the committee would be convened to hear representation regarding the Spicer commission.

Your Honour also conjectured, at page 18326 on Tuesday, March 12, as to why a resignation of the chair of the consumer and corporate affairs committee had not yet been filled. As the House knows, the chairman of the transport committee also resigned six months ago and the committee has not been able to meet say for one token attempt.

I respectfully submit that the transportation committee has a great deal of important work to cover in the interests of Canadians, including the parliamentary scrutiny of nearly \$50 million in supplementary estimates, public fund expenditures which will not have been examined because of this government's refusal to have the committee sit.

I request that a similar motion to that adopted with respect to the consumer and corporate affairs committee be moved immediately.

Mr. Speaker: I may be able to assist hon. members. First of all I think I should point out that if I had to rule on this I would have to say, given the circumstances, it is

not a question of privilege. It is more a point of order raised probably to invite the government to respond.

As I had to say the other day, this is not something in which the Speaker, under the present rules, can intervene. The Speaker can encourage hon. members to try to settle these matters. There may very well be discussions taking place at this very time. It is not necessary for the government to respond under the circumstances, but I would invite the hon. member for Calgary West to comment if he so chooses.

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for raising the issue. It has been of considerable concern to government members that we have had eight of our committees, one special and seven standing committees that do not represent the balance of the House. We were pleased to be able to stand last Wednesday and resolve one of the problems.

The government's point of view on this from the beginning has been that there is a need, if we want to retain the same number of committees, to reduce the size of committees because the large size committee of 14 was not working well. The solution we had for consumer and corporate affairs was to increase that one to 15, which provides something closer to the composition of the House.

I want to report to the House that that committee has met successfully twice, but of the seven seats assigned to opposition members only three have been filled on each of those occasions. Thus there have been four vacant seats.

The obligation of governing has required us to fill the eight seats. Last night that led to a dilemma in that opposition members who were present did not want the government members each to have their turn in questioning the witnesses from the Spicer commission. They felt that the questioning process went on too long because there were in fact 10 members involved before getting to the second round. In fact some visitors to the committee who are Independents in the House walked out because they were having to wait so long and did not have a chance.

I think it speaks to the issue from the government point of view that if the committees in many cases, not all, were to be somewhat smaller then the participation rate of members both on the opposition and the government side would be fuller and more complete and we would not have the phenomenon of filling the chair simply to fulfil the voting function of a committee.