

Private Members' Business

The hon. member for Mission—Coquitlam has proposed a motion to the House and I am pleased to speak on it. I was surprised that she did not quote from her leader in the course of her remarks. I thought a decree had been issued from the leader's office that all members of the Reform Party were to quote the leader in every speech at least once. Perhaps she forgot the decree this afternoon.

I would like to help her out because I have a quote from the little green book. It is the little book of Reform, the gospel according to the hon. member for Calgary Southwest and the Reform Party.

The hon. member for Calgary Southwest in one of his more lucid moments said: "The three priorities of the present Senate are in order: protocol, alcohol and Geritol". These remarks might be considered by some to be insulting of the Senate. I guess for that reason the hon. member for Mission—Coquitlam did not feel it was appropriate to quote those remarks. However, I have quoted them.

The hon. member for Calgary Southwest evidently thinks these remarks are appropriate. I know that his views are shared by the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster because the last time I quoted this he was citing along with me. He remembered all the words. He had memorized the words of his leader and quoted them along with me.

I point them out because there is a lot of agreement on that point among members of her party apparently. Yet, at the same time, they have not proposed the abolition of the Senate, as members of the other group which was largely western based, the New Democratic Party, used to do and still does. They now are back to abolition but for a while they supported the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, you will remember in the last Parliament when we were debating the GST that the NDP changed its principles. The principle was that there could not be an unelected body in Parliament; however, it changed its principles in the course of the GST debate.

I see that I have hit a nerve.

Mr. Morrison: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am wondering what the relevance of all this is to the matter which is under debate.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary will make his point relevant very soon.

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. member for Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia that this motion deals with the Senate; it is not on gun control. He may have heard the hon. member for Mission—Coquitlam spend half of her time speaking on gun control. The only reason she did so was that her arguments on this motion were so thin she ran out of them in about 10 minutes and had to fill in the rest of her time on gun control.

This motion is about Senate reform. If the hon. member had read the motion instead of making these interruptions, he would realize what I am talking about. We are talking about the Senate and I was talking about the approach of the New Democratic Party to the Senate. It wanted to abolish it. The motion before us is not for abolition; it is for a triple E Senate and it is that to which I wish to speak.

The hon. member's motion proposes changes to the powers, the method of selecting senators and the number of members by which a province is entitled to be represented in the Senate. Thus the motion would require a constitutional amendment under the seven provinces with 50 per cent of the population general amending procedure. That is what would have to be done in order to achieve the amendment as proposed by the hon. member.

This seven and fifty amendment, as we call it, seven provinces and 50 per cent of the population represented by those seven provinces, must have the consent of the House of Commons and the legislative assemblies of two-thirds of the provinces representing at least 50 per cent of the population according to the most current general census. The Senate could in respect of such a constitutional amendment exercise a six-month suspensive veto.

Once again, I would say to the hon. member that the Charlottetown accord contained a Senate amendment proposal along the lines proposed in the hon. member's motion, but it was defeated by a majority of Canadians in a majority of the provinces. There is little evidence to indicate that Canadians wish to reopen this constitutional debate. Other issues, such as the economy and job creation, are the priorities of Canadians. That is why the government is dealing with those issues and not the one the hon. member has raised today or any others like it.

• (1405)

I think the hon. member would agree that despite her best intentions, this is not a good time to be opening a constitutional debate in this country, as her motion would suggest. In Quebec the current government of that province is unlikely to approve any constitutional changes, save for an amendment making the province an independent country.

It is important to note that because Quebec's approval will be necessary to achieve the kind of Senate reform she wants, we should not bother pursuing it. We need that agreement. It is not just because it has to be part of the seven and fifty portion of the agreement; Quebec has a special arrangement.

Quebec of all the provinces is divided into 24 electoral divisions for the purposes of representation in the Senate pursuant to section 22 of the 1867 Constitution Act, the British North America Act. Because Quebec senators must meet their property or residence qualifications in the division they represent, it could be argued that a scheme for Senate reform which sought to provide equal representation for the provinces, as this motion does, might require not only seven of the provinces