

ceiling on family reunification. He should know that. He should know that anyone who qualifies under the family reunification section of the Immigration Act is a top priority. He should also recognize that the Government that put restrictions on brothers and sisters, and other relatives, was the Government of which he was a member.

Mr. Kaplan: I hope the Minister recognizes that different considerations should apply to setting levels in times of economic recovery as opposed to the past few years of recession. All Members of Parliament have cases in their offices where the ceilings do apply and where we are talking about relatives, brothers, sisters, older children, married children—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Does the Member have a supplementary question, please?

GOVERNMENT POLICY

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, since the Minister admitted in the House that she was having further studies done, will she, while waiting for these studies, at least ease up and not make it more difficult for the reunification of family members?

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what the Hon. Member and the Government of which he was a part did in the past, but I can tell him that this Government will take a very humane, and very fair, and very compassionate approach to the question of immigration. One of the reasons why we are not going with the three-year projections that the former Government announced is that we want to see a review of the Immigration Act and immigration levels, so that the very problems he raises can be addressed. I look forward to his co-operation in this effort.

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

CONTENT OF GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister and concerns the guidelines adopted yesterday by Cabinet on government communication with the public. These guidelines effectively make a mockery of the Government's commitment to openness and accountability. For the first time ever, these guidelines put a gag on public servants in their dealings not just with the media but with Members of Parliament as well.

How can the Prime Minister possibly justify this Draconian new rule which bars all off-the-record, background briefings, even on factual information, not just for the media but for Members of Parliament as well? How can he justify this massive denial of information to the media and Members of Parliament?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the answer is that we are not going to do what the Hon. Member says. His statement is silly, inaccurate, and he knows it. The reason he knows it is that he was at my press conference this morning.

The fact of the matter is that we have released guidelines which are designed to provide access to information in every reasonable circumstance consistent with our obligation to try to present government policy first of all in the House of Commons. It is intended to open doors to the media and Members of the House of Commons. It is designed, as well, to ensure that public servants who are called upon to comment on government policy are allowed to do so on the record, and in full freedom. It is designed to open the doors and windows of secrecy which have existed here for 20 years.

● (1125)

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Prime Minister should read his own guidelines which are effectively designed to ensure that one message, and one message alone, goes out from the Government and that is the one which the Prime Minister and his Deputy approve.

OFF-RECORD, BACKGROUND BRIEFINGS

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, will the Prime Minister not confirm that, pursuant to Guideline No. 2 with respect to off-the-record background briefings, although these briefings were permitted up to the present time, they are not to be permitted in the future, either with the media or with the respect to Members of Parliament who are defined as members of the public in paragraph 1? Why on earth is it that Members of Parliament are being denied the basic right to off-the-record briefings with public servants who work on behalf of the people of Canada?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the answer is that they are not. There are guidelines, but we circularized as well, this morning, a letter that I sent to Deputy Ministers and Ministers. As I indicated at the press conference, it is to be read concurrent with the provisions of the guidelines. On page 3 of the letter it states: "The guidelines also stress that all contacts with the media by public servants should be made in an open on-the-record basis. Off-the-record background briefings will be permitted in exceptional circumstances and must have prior ministerial approval."

That is entirely appropriate because it is entirely consistent with the oath of office of a public servant. The oath of office of a public servant is to make available information and to explain public government policy, not to criticize or defend it. That is the commitment of a public servant.

We want to ensure that the integrity and non-political dimension of the Public Service be retained at all times. We believe in the integrity and independence of the Public Service. That is why we are establishing what we believe are fair parameters which place them—