

Search and Rescue

time of the House with this kind of attempt to stonewall attempts to obtain very straightforward, legitimate, and as far as I know, non-confidential information. Hon. members on the government side sit by idly on their hands, which they are used to doing. Backbenchers have a stake in this, and I think the rights and privileges of every member of parliament are affected.

I do not speak here on the basis of party politics. I simply say to all backbenchers opposite that it is as important to them to have access to information from the government as it is for opposition members, and if in their hearts they really believe that the institution of parliament is important, they will not participate in this sham debate and prevent information from being given to the hon. member, to this House, and to the people of Lake Winnipeg. Backbenchers on the government side have every bit as much at stake in this matter as any opposition member.

I want to conclude now. I did not intend to participate. The reason I rose was because I thought the previous speaker was going to enunciate at least one reason for refusing the reasonable request of the hon. member for Selkirk. Since that is not the case, I can only come to the very regrettable conclusion that the government is again demonstrating the kind of arrogance we have had to put up with for too long in our country.

Mr. Ralph E. Goodale (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, on other recent occasions I have had the opportunity to address a few remarks to this Chamber following my friend, the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar (Mr. Hnatyshyn). I find myself in the same position this afternoon—

An hon. Member: Confused.

Mr. Goodale: —of having to respond to gross overstatements and misstatements which the hon. member has attempted to put on the record with reference to the subject we are discussing this afternoon, as well as other topics we have discussed on other occasions. His remarks today in relation to the question of freedom of information and in relation to the motion we have before us, which was proposed by the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Whiteway), overstated and misstated the case, and they seem to me to be reminiscent of remarks we often hear from Conservative members in this House and outside this House when they address themselves to the concerns of western Canada.

I would like to draw a parallel between what we have just heard from the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar and what we often hear from Conservative members from western Canada. Their impact here and across the country always tends to be minimized simply because of the way they approach their arguments, and by that approach they destroy the very case they try to make. In this Chamber we often hear complaints about western issues. As a member of parliament from western Canada I believe I understand those complaints. I sympathize with a great many of them, but hon. members opposite complain in this House, in bitter and vitriolic tones

[Mr. Hnatyshyn.]

about, for example, snowslides in the Rockies with the same degree of emphasis as they complain about such legitimate concerns as freight rates, transportation problems, agricultural problems or whatever.

If they are trying to present a case to Canadians which they want redressed and if they are trying to explain what westerners are concerned about, and what westerners want to see corrected within Confederation, I think it would be more to their advantage, and certainly to the advantage of western Canada, if they could stick to the point and make their arguments in compelling terms and in realistic terms without resorting to overstatements, misstatements, or to tactics which simply undercut the very arguments they are trying to make.

Mr. Whiteway: What is your point?

Mr. Goodale: The hon. member asks, "What is the point?" The point is that if we want to see our concerns addressed and redressed in this parliament or by the government, then surely it is important for us to state our cases here in fair, honest, and frank terms, sticking to the facts and presenting those cases in the best way we can, rather than trying to overstate or misstate our cases and by those very tactics themselves undercut the very arguments we are trying to make.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Goodale: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Would the hon. member tell us what motion he is speaking about? What are we talking about?

Mr. Goodale: It is very rare that I have an opportunity to draw to the attention of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) the motion we are discussing. I am sure he is aware it is motion No. 25, the motion I am responding to.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Has the hon. member read it?

Mr. Goodale: Yes indeed, I have.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): What does it say?

Mr. Friesen: He doesn't even know.

Mr. Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I can read the order paper as well as any other hon. member. I am dealing with the argument we heard from the hon. member for Saskatoon-Biggar, who tried to deal with the very serious issue of freedom of information and the access of members of parliament to information, but instead of dealing with that point in a credible, realistic, and practical way, and instead of trying to obtain some real results, he again lapsed into that old Tory habit of overstating his case and of dealing with matters in a peculiar and partisan way rather than dealing with the substance of the issue. It is an important issue. The hon. member managed to undercut himself by the very way he approached