

Privilege—Mr. McGrath

over this responsibility. This shows to me, and should show to all of us as members of Parliament, that there is a plan afoot to enter into and cross that line of appropriate advertising which should be used only for educational or informative purposes, that is to say, when legislation has been approved and passed by Parliament.

Madam Speaker, there is a pattern being developed by this government, and in the instances that I put before you I hope to convince you there is a valid question of privilege here. We had initially a quarter of a million dollars spent on a decision that had already been made by the government with respect to the acquisition of fighter aircraft in Canada—a quarter of a million dollars congratulating the government on a good decision. They did that before the test plane crashed. The fact is it was a self-congratulatory and self-serving kind of advertisement which had nothing whatever to do with a question of education or information but, rather, was politically motivated.

My colleague now has raised the question of advertising with respect to energy matters—misleading in the extreme.

An hon. Member: False!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: False and wrong. These particular advertising campaigns are telling Canadians they have nothing to worry about with respect to their energy future, when we know there is an energy crisis. Now, with respect to the matter that is before the House, we have a debate taking place on the very rudiments, the very fundamental principles upon which our country is based, our constitution. Political cynicism has been observed in this country before. But I doubt whether or not it has cost us in the vicinity of \$6 million every time the Minister of State for Multiculturalism addresses the cabinet. That is the ultimate in political cynicism with respect to the very important matter which I and every member of this House feel very strongly about.

My final submission to Your Honour is this: there has been a memorandum which has been under consideration by cabinet, which has been leaked and which has been acknowledged by the minister as well as by the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). Just so we do not lose sight of the gravity of what the government is entering into with this advertising campaign, I want to quote from this memorandum. It may involve \$6 million with respect to the constitution at the present time, but there is every possibility of substantially more money being spent and, indeed, with respect to all its advertising, the estimate is now upward of \$50 million.

● (1520)

I believe that a committee should be seized with looking at the advice which the government is now receiving, to consider and recommend to the House guidelines with respect to government advertising. If we look at what has been recommended by the minister through his advisers to cabinet, there is additional reason for having this matter sent to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

I would like to quote from this memorandum which outlines the scenario with regard to advertising on the constitutional debate:

But once the government has decided what action it intends to take and Parliament has been reconvened to debate that proposed action, the role of advertising changes. At that point, public funds are being used to sell the governing party's position, yet such funds are not available to opposition parties. Thus, the opposition has no effective way to respond, in contrast to the provinces which can, and did during the summer, respond by running their own advertising programs. Under these circumstances, ministers need to decide if advertising is politically legitimate.

That quotation, Madam Speaker, speaks volumes with respect to the intrusion into the House of Commons and the effect that this kind of advertising campaign has on my ability and yours to represent the people whom we have been elected to represent adequately. What is happening is that we are turning this whole question of constitutional reform, indeed, every major issue which comes up in our country, into an advertising war between different levels of government, and between the government with the power of the purse in its hand and the opposition, the role and function of which is to criticize constructively the programs of the government.

Never in this Parliament has there been an issue of this consequence with respect to the invasion of the rights of members of Parliament. I strongly support the motion put forth by my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath).

Madam Speaker: I can see that there are several members who want to speak on this particular question. I want to thank the hon. member who just spoke for having at least during part of his speech attempted to focus on the reasons for which he thinks there is a question of privilege. I want to remind hon. members who intend to speak that at this particular stage of the proceedings I am trying to be enlightened as to where the privilege stands. I would be grateful if hon. members would focus their remarks on elaborating where they feel the question of privilege lies.

I have not yet found a *prima facie* case of privilege, nor have I found to the contrary, but I am trying to inform myself of the reasons for which there might be a question of privilege. I would be grateful if, rather than debating the question itself, hon. members would concentrate their remarks in that area.

Hon. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, in rising to support the question of privilege by the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), I agree with your ruling that the issue before us is whether or not the privileges of myself and my colleagues to participate and come up with a decision on the proposed resolution have in any way been thwarted. We must put the matter into context in view of the fact that throughout the summer there was a campaign by the government to put before the Canadian people their position on constitutional renewal. Some members of this House stated, before we rose for the summer recess, that Parliament was the place where this matter should be first debated.

That debate is now in the House. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), in his address to the nation last Thursday, said that