

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the point of order, I had simply wanted to conclude and explain that the petitions we were tabling today were in response to requests by large numbers of Canadians to have their say directly as part of the parliamentary process by signing petitions.

We were beginning today to table petitions in conformity with the rules. We have very large numbers of petitions. We do not intend to try to table all of them today, but for days and days to come we will be giving Canadians a chance to plug directly into the parliamentary process to express their opposition to the government's goods and services tax.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, the government through the party Whip has just shown its contempt for the views of ordinary Canadians.

Mr. Speaker: I am afraid I am going to have to be strict here. I know the hon. member for Windsor West is rising on the same point of order as the hon. member from the government side rose on. I can allow some leeway, but I think this is getting into debate and I am going to move strictly to petitions.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I give you notice now that I respectfully ask you to request the Whip to withdraw the term "obscene", as I think it is a contempt of Parliament to say that a member in carrying out his parliamentary duty on behalf of Canadians when it comes to tabling petitions is doing something obscene. I think this is unparliamentary and it is an insult to the people of Canada, and I ask that you rule that the hon. member should withdraw his words.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I would be very happy to withdraw any remark which the House Leader of the Official Opposition finds offensive. I do think that respect for Parliament requires all of us, and especially people charged with additional responsibility such as House Leaders, to respect the traditions of the House and the rules of the House, and I would hope that we will do so.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): This gentleman is the last person to give me, of all people, lectures on parliamentary traditions.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary West has I think withdrawn the word which has been complained of, and again, I would ask that hon. members get on with presenting their petitions.

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, before I present my petition I would like to rise on another point of order, and that is regarding the processes of having our petitions certified.

I think all members would have found that there is an incredible backlog at the moment in the office where the petitions have to be certified. I want to make the point that this is in no way a reflection on the people involved in the office that certifies our petitions, but many of us have had petitions in for at least three weeks and are still waiting for them to be processed.

Perhaps I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, and your office, to examine the problem and see if there is not some action that can be taken to rectify it.

We have an obligation to present the petitions that are signed by our constituents as soon as possible. To have them sitting in some office for three, four or five weeks is not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker: I take seriously the intervention of the hon. member for Kamloops, and I know that other members have had the same problem.

I would advise the House that four more people have been assigned to deal with the petitions and, as the Hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition made clear in his earlier remarks this morning, there are going to be a lot of petitions. We will make every effort that we can to ensure that they are expedited as efficiently as possible.

The point is well taken, and I say to other hon. members, including the hon. member for Windsor West, that we will try to move these petitions as quickly as possible. It is not lack of concern for the importance of the subject matter or for the numbers; we are doing the best we can. If we are still having difficulty in a day or two, I would expect hon. members to make representation to me and I will see what we can do.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your comments, and to assist the House, when the government Whip rose to his feet I was simply trying to explain that we have a large number of petitions and why we have such a large number of petitions, but to assist the staff of the House we did not intend to try to table them all at one time.