

*Routine Proceedings*

lease. This matter was pursued further by the hon. member for Winnipeg North who demanded an apology from the hon. member for Don Valley North for having accused him of releasing the report. The hon. member for Don Valley North subsequently offered an apology and also asked that the Chair investigate this matter; she further intimated that the list of persons who could have released the report was very short and in doing so, made specific reference to the hon. member for Halifax. The next day, May 26, the hon. member for Halifax rose on a question of privilege to request that the hon. member for Don Valley North rectify the unfortunate impression left by her statement of May 25. The hon. member for Don Valley North responded that no specific inference was intended and she reiterated her request for an investigation of the alleged leak.

In this ruling, I will deal with what I believe to be the two components at issue here: firstly, the breach of privilege resulting from the premature disclosure of a committee report and secondly, the very serious nature of conclusions arrived at and expressed during these interventions.

As members are aware, committee work must not be impeded by lack of trust or integrity. Over the years, there have been quite a number of cases brought to the attention of the Chair where alleged leaks of confidential committee information had taken place. In order to summarize the practice which has evolved in such cases, allow me to refer to a case which took place in 1987.

[Translation]

In 1987, the hon. member for Kenora—Rainy River disclosed the content of some proceedings of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development which was sitting *in camera*. Later on, the matter was brought before the House through the report submitted by that committee. On the same day, a question of privilege was raised by the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake. The Chair held that the question was sufficiently serious to ask the House to give its opinion on the matter. The House then referred the matter to the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure, which concluded that the conduct of the member was contrary to the usage and practice of the House. Some time thereafter, the hon. member for Kenora—Rainy River apologized to the House.

[English]

In keeping with our practices, it is therefore essential that the committee itself first review the situation and look at all aspects of the concerns raised by the hon. members. If it sees fit, the committee may then report the matter to the House. In this way, if the Chair judges that a *prima facie* breach of privilege has occurred, then the hon. members of the House can decide whether the question should be referred to the Standing Committee on House Management for further consideration.

[Translation]

The premature release of committee reports hampers the continued work of committees and puts the trust that exists between committee members at risk. Our democratic system is based on the very principle of trust and such incidents can only undermine the parliamentary regime by which we are governed.

[English]

Finally, the second element at issue here is one that needs to be addressed with great prudence. The Chair need not remind all members that gratuitous inferences made at the expense of individuals in this Chamber or outside can have devastating repercussions, be they founded or not.

• (1510)

Personal accusations have no place in the House of Commons. Dignity must prevail at all times and it is my duty to uphold it in this place.

I want to thank all members for their patience and I am confident that members will demonstrate their usual good judgment and respect for one another in dealing with this matter.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Charles A. Langlois (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and to Minister of National Defence):** Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 11 petitions.

[Editor's Note: see today's Votes and Proceedings.]