

whatever the number may be. The Speaker already has authority to defer the taking of those votes until the debate at report stage is over.

As I understand it, this motion says—and this is what we were talking about as House leaders—that when that point is reached, when the debate at the report stage is over, the House leaders will meet and suggest a day, not more than a week later, when those votes should be taken. After the report stage comes third reading and we go through the same process again. Quite frankly, I do not see anything sinister or out of the way about it. When the four House leaders meet, we represent both views of the question of capital punishment. This motion represents what both sides would like, namely, a clear understanding as to when the votes will be taken. I hope, therefore, that the House will accept this motion.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Northumberland-Durham was quite right when he indicated that this was a completely free vote situation. I have said before that as far as this party is concerned, that is so, making no comment about any other party in the House of Commons.

As opposition House leader, I have felt a certain duty to the members of my caucus. That duty, in terms of a free vote situation, is to ensure, to the greatest possible degree that I can, that members who have business elsewhere, regardless of what their position might be with respect to legislation before the House, will know when they are to vote. This is a way of bringing certainty to the vote, not to end or foreshorten discussions, as you will notice from reading the motion, as to the time of the vote. The purpose is to benefit all members of the House, particularly my colleagues.

Mr. Horner: Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak on this because it marks a very important milestone with regard to what is becoming an established precedent in the House of Commons, namely, the forecasting of when votes will occur. It makes it easier for each one of us to represent our constituents. We can play golf. We can be away. We know when the vote is coming. I read from time to time in the press that parliament has lost its aura, that it no longer really matters, that is has become humdrum, that no one attends, that no one is interested. The purpose of the bells ringing is to summon members to vote. Members are supposed to be within the call of the bell. That is the principle. It is your job, Mr. Speaker, to ring the bells until all members who can possibly be summoned have been summoned, and a vote is then taken. We shall abide by whatever the House decides on this issue, but I believe I would be remiss in my duty if I allowed this matter to pass as an accepted principle.

● (1520)

That great expert on the rules who has spoken—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Horner: —believes he is a protector of parliament. How many times have parliamentarians given him that credit? I hope the good Lord strikes me dead if I ever do. He believes he is a protector of parliament, yet in his

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endorsement of this motion he is in some small way contributing to the erosion of the importance of parliament.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Horner: I have watched this practice grow in the last three or four years, this postponing of votes to deal with amendments. It is one which, for example, links my amendment with five or six others, something which detracts from its importance; it becomes one of a hodge-podge of amendments on which votes are taken. If parliament is to regain any importance in the minds of those who sit here, and in the minds of the people, votes must be recorded with respect to these amendments. It is an important part of a member's duty. If this process of erosion continues, before too long there will be proxy voting in the House of Commons. It would be easier that way. Members would not need to bother to go to Ottawa at all; they could just send in a signed statement.

As I say, I will abide by the wish of the House on this issue, as will all members, but I cannot allow this point of order to pass without putting on record my view that it is a contribution to the erosion of the importance of parliament and of our parliamentary system.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stevens: I, too, would like to take exception to this proposed motion. In addition to the arguments which have been advanced by several of my hon. friends in the opposition, I would point out that it would be most unfortunate if you, Mr. Speaker, were to follow this procedure during report stage, because many of the amendments which will be before us are interrelated and it might well happen that if a particular amendment were carried, further amendments would not need to be debated. In the long run, an arrangement of this type might even delay the proceedings, rather than expedite them. This is a dangerous precedent and I do not think it is called for in the circumstances. Surely members who are interested in this debate should be in their place ready for a vote, whenever that vote might come up.

[Translation]

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, to explain my approval of the special order put forward by the government leader, I have to say that my understanding is that there will be a vote at report stage and another no more than five days after the conclusion of the debate on third reading of Bill C-84. I am not speaking on behalf of my colleagues since this will be a free vote, but I should like to say that it would be better if we knew when the vote on third reading and the vote at report stage will be held.

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta has already spoken in the debate, although it was a very short speech. He might have been under the impression he was raising a point of order rather than making a speech on a debatable motion. In any event, if he is to speak now, unanimous consent will be necessary. Is there such consent?