

*Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

objectionable because not every omnibus Bill is objectionable. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines "omnibus" as "serving several objects comprising several items". This Bill serves only one object, to implement the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. It comprises only one item, the legislation necessary to implement that agreement. The fact it makes amendments to several Acts does not change the simple cohesiveness of the Bill.

Even if one accepted the Opposition's claim that this Bill is properly termed an omnibus Bill because it amends a significant number of Acts, that alone would not make it objectionable to this House. The issue is not whether the Bill is an omnibus Bill but whether it is out of order. As I will argue in a few moments, we are confident that not only this Bill is completely in order but that it is in the best possible form for discussion by the House.

The second point that I would like to dispose of at the beginning is the Opposition's demand that the Bill be divided. I will argue that there is no reason whatsoever for the House not to consider this Bill in its present form. But even if you, Mr. Speaker, were to find the Bill objectionable, it is clear from the rulings of previous Speakers that the Speaker will not order the Bill to be divided. I need only remind you, Mr. Speaker, of the 1982 precedent of Bill C-94, the Energy Security Act. At that time, members of my Party had argued vigorously and, in my view, with complete justification, that the omnibus energy Bill addressed too many disparate issues for the House to have a coherent debate and vote on it.

● (1620)

Your Honour will recall that that Bill was perhaps the clearest example of a procedurally objectionable omnibus Bill in our history. It created several unrelated new Acts, and made substantial unrelated amendments to several more statutes. When we finally agreed, by House order, to divide it, we had eight separate substantial Bills. Yet even in those circumstances the Speaker of the day could find no rule or precedent allowing her to divide the Bill.

The rules have not changed. A motion which contains more than one question is another matter, of course. However, it is clear that a Bill cannot be divided by the Speaker on the grounds put forward by the Opposition. It is up to the House to decide whether or not a Bill should be divided.

With respect to the main points, first, this Bill, the free trade Bill, puts a single question before the House. That being so, it clearly satisfies any test of procedural acceptability. The title of the Bill is not very long, however, it is abundantly clear. It is "an Act to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and the United States of America". That title sums up the purpose and scope of this Bill eloquently and accurately.

The Bill is bulky. It does contain amendments to 27 existing Acts, but its single theme, its central and sole proposition, is this. The Government asks Parliament to approve and implement the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, period.

This is not a case where Parliament can pick and choose among the pieces of the Bill, or make substantial modifications to its contents. This is a Bill to give effect in Canadian law to a treaty signed with a foreign Government. If Parliament approves the agreement, the various amendments to existing legislation are a natural and necessary consequence. If we do not make all the amendments, the agreement will not be implemented by the United States, just as we will not implement the agreement if the United States does not make all the necessary amendments to its legislation. It is an all or nothing proposition that we are putting to the House—go ahead with the agreement, or do not.

Let me describe briefly the Bill in order to illustrate my point. It consists of five parts and two schedules. Part I approves and implements the agreement in general. Part II establishes the procurement review board, which carries out certain obligations in Chapter 13 of the agreement relating to government procurement. Part III amends the Special Import Measures Act, in order to establish the binational dispute settlement process called for by Chapter 19 of the agreement, and to reflect the agreement's provisions regarding emergency action. Part IV makes amendments to 26 existing Acts, the majority of which relate to imports and exports, agriculture and financial services. Every one of these amendments is required in order to meet our obligations under the free trade agreement.

Part V consists of transitional provisions, and the requirement that before legislation is brought into force the Governor in Council must be satisfied that the United States has taken satisfactory steps to carry out its side of the bargain.

Schedule I sets out the text of the agreement which was signed on January 2. It is included in the Bill for the purposes of convenience. Schedule II contains the Canadian tariff.

It will be abundantly clear to the House from this description that the Bill is in no way objectionable, procedurally or otherwise. It has one single unified purpose—to give legal effect to the free trade agreement. It does not create several new Acts. It makes amendments to a number of statutes, but the amendments are all directly related to the free trade agreement. The only matter of principle in the Bill is whether or not the free trade agreement should be approved. Once that is decided, the other provisions of the Bill follow as a necessary consequence.

My second main point is whether or not this Bill can be categorized as an omnibus Bill. It is being submitted to the House in the most appropriate form for consideration by the House. It satisfies every test of procedural acceptability.

Objections to putting omnibus Bills before the House generally speaking, are based on the fact that they contain unrelated amendments to several Acts, or enact several unrelated statutes. The fundamental reason that objection is taken to such Bills is that the House should not be denied the opportunity to express itself separately on each distinct proposal put before it. Where a single Bill contains several