

Government Orders

• (1710)

Mr. Jim Karpoff (Surrey North): Mr. Speaker, I would like the previous speaker to comment on some of the things that I see in this legislation, particularly as it relates to discussions of budgets.

My only other experiences as an elected official prior to being elected to the House of Commons was on Surrey Council. There the council sat several times as a committee of the whole, probably in total six or seven days, looking at the budget.

I am on the health committee. We get to examine the budget for one hour because that is all the time the minister is coming before us. We would debate the budget in Surrey Council maybe over three or four council meetings; here it is now going to be restricted to four days.

What I see happening in these changes is that the government is trying to say that it can spend less time on a national budget, debating, looking and examining the expenditure of the country's money, than the Surrey Council will spend looking at a municipal budget.

So I would like the member's comments as to how he sees these new rules affecting our ability to look at the national budget.

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, the budget is not simply a statement of figures. In the budget the government will show where it wants to take the country, where it stands on economic matters and social matters. It is very important that this House has all the time necessary, whether through committees or in the House here, to go item by item through the budget.

The member was telling us of his experience on a municipal council. I had my experience on a school board council. We had a budget of about \$80 million and we used to take a week, close ourselves in and study the budget, and take it item by item. We used to prepare the budget. Here, we have a minister who gives us a speech which may be an hour, an hour and a half on national television, announcing that immediately people are affected by that.

We now have six days to debate the budget. The government wants to reduce that number to four, and then that is it.

An hon. member: That is it. And then they want to cut that back.

Mr. Gagliano: Yes, I agree with the member. I think we will have to have enough time, all the time necessary, because the budget is very important. That is where the government tells us what decisions it has made.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. Debate, the hon. Deputy House Leader.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marcel Danis (Minister of State (Youth), Minister of State (Fitness and Amateur Sport) and Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to be able to address the House of Commons this afternoon on the subject of motion number 30, which deals with changes to the rules of this House. We call our rules Standing Orders. Canadian Parliamentary Law began, of course, in 1867 and, over the years, we have evolved a set of rules about how to behave, how to enact laws, how to govern and how to ask government to be accountable to the nation.

Mr. Speaker, our rules, our standing orders, were first put together by J.G. Bourinot, who was the clerk of this house for 22 years, from 1880 to 1902. He relied to a large degree, on precedent and practice which came from the British House of Commons.

Once we had a clear idea of our rules, we began, as Canadians, to outline our own way of proceeding in the House and the Senate. Some would now term us well organized, rational, clear in our use of language and procedures and, Mr. Speaker, concise. Others may apply different epithets to their descriptions of the way this House operates. Being a dynamic and ever-changing group of men and women we, as parliamentarians, exhibit dynamism and willingness to change, in the ways in which we make laws.

We have produced, over the last 124 years, a plethora of rules and procedures. These are motivated by politeness, by legal simplicity and by history.

Motion 30, debated now, is one of the occasional attempts to change and modernize how this House operates. We have 159 Standing Orders, many of which are sub-divided into several parts. A lot of words govern our lives in this Chamber. Many of these are more than 120 years old.