

Privilege

Mr. MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, if the House would allow me a very few moments to unfurl my argument, you will find that I am stating a case of privilege. This is a very important matter. Therefore, I believe it is important to lay the groundwork. I will continue.

For instance, a reader can seek clarification by referring to a specific text. In the case of radio ads, the listener has no such recourse. Therefore, in my view it is a medium which is more easily manipulated because the information is very selective. It is disseminated in a matter of mere seconds, and the first impression is usually a lasting one.

In light of these facts, it is incumbent upon those who use this medium to be responsible and provide an accurate message which should not be deceptive or misleading. I submit the Department of Finance has failed once again to honour this important obligation.

I would like to read into the record the text of an ad which was broadcast to my constituents and other listeners.

An hon. member: Come on.

Mr. Speaker: The ad is short, and there is no reason why it should not be read into the record. Having got it into the record, I want to hear where the breach of privilege is.

Mr. MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, I will.

The ad mentions a number of things which are inconsistent. I think they are a false reporting of the papers of this place. The ad states: "Number one, this is not an additional tax since it replaces the current federal sales tax." This is simply not true. "We know from records that have been placed on the table that the GST will apply to many services that are now untaxed."

The ad also says—

Mr. Speaker: The difficulty the Chair is having is that this is getting into a continuation of the debate that takes place in the House day after day after day on this.

The government has one version of the facts and others dispute that. They have a different version. That in itself does not create a question of privilege. An application for privilege should be confined to what way this ad has breached an hon. member's privilege or in

what way this ad amounts to a contempt of the House. That is what I would have to decide.

I do not think it is appropriate for the Chair to allow this to get into a general, long, broad-ranging debate on different views of what the particular tax does. I give as an example, and I am reading what the hon. member has kindly given me: "It is not an additional tax since it replaces the current federal sales tax." That statement in could invite a great deal of comment one way or the other. I do not think it is appropriate that we get into a debate on that here.

If there is a clear statement here which is so inappropriate that it affects the rights and duties of a member in carrying on those rights and duties in the Chamber, then we have to consider whether that is privilege. If it is so outrageous that it is a contempt of Parliament then that, of course, is what I have to consider.

I would ask the hon. member to remember that this is not a place to get into a general wide ranging debate on the whole question of whether the proposed tax is or is not a replacement of another tax or to the degree that it replaces or does not replace it. I would ask hon. members to keep that in mind.

Mr. MacDonald (Dartmouth): Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, this is the first time I have raised a point of privilege in the House. I have done my best to keep with the record of what is appropriate for points of privilege.

I will shorten my argument considerably. If anyone reads that ad, it is quite clear in my view that the spirit of the Speaker's ruling of October 10 has been violated. At the very beginning of the one-minute ad, the word "proposed" is there. No where else in the ad does it mention that this is a proposed tax that has not passed all the legislative process.

In addition, when dealing with the actual wording, which I think is very important, and I think the Speaker would agree, in situations such as this it does not say that the proposed GST "would", it says that the GST "will". That is quite an important word.

I read through the submission by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra and I carefully read the ruling of the Speaker. We seem to be in a position where the record of this place is being misrepresented. It may only be by a word, but it is something that must be stopped.