

Business of the House

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the Hon. Member and I want to raise a couple of questions. He suggested that the Opposition was wrong to have devoted so much time in the House during the past weeks to this particular issue. Perhaps he is not aware of the frustrations we felt when questions about the conflict of interest situation were ruled out of order in the Standing Committee on Regional Industrial Expansion and in the Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure which, as he said, has a limited mandate. We were forced back into the House of Commons.

I know that when the Member's Party was in opposition it, too, found that the only way to shake a majority Government was to focus on one issue. I contend that the issue of the integrity of an important Minister goes to the heart of what the Government is all about. If the integrity of a major Minister or of the Cabinet as a whole is in question, it is not worth talking about other issues for which the Government is responsible.

If the Hon. Member believes that there must be another way by which these issues can be resolved, I am not in disagreement with him. Can he make some constructive suggestions as to how that can be done in a way in which the Opposition could avoid using Question Period as its only recourse and putting this question so firmly on the agenda that the Minister finally had no choice but to do what he should have done 10 days ago, that is, resign?

Mr. McGrath: I thank the Hon. Member for that constructive intervention. I believe that there are ways of dealing with issues without consuming the entire Question Period, especially during the supply period. I have already referred to the fact that the matter could have been raised, and can still be raised—although I question the propriety of it now after what has happened today—at the new Standing Committee on Consumer and Corporate Affairs which has the responsibility of examining the Estimates of the Registrar General and before which the Assistant Deputy Registrar General can be called. It can be raised in the Committee on Government Operations where the Estimates of the Prime Minister's Office are examined. It can be raised in any number of ways. At the end of the supply period, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) can, under a new procedure, designate any one Department to have its Estimates examined for two weeks beyond the deadline of May 31.

The new committee system is barely a month old. I believe that when it starts functioning and we are able to develop a degree of collegiality as a consequence of the tenured membership which we hopefully now enjoy, it will lead to a development of expertise and that that collegiality will perhaps allow for more objectivity within the standing committees. I think that process would be furthered by the admission of all media, including electronic media. Quite frankly, it does seem to be functioning now but, by the same token, I do not think all of the avenues were thoroughly exhausted.

Mr. Cassidy: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Hon. Member's comments with respect to the use of the Estimates process. Is he not aware that the Estimates process is severely circumscribed? Only two hours have been allocated for the consideration of about a billion dollars worth of spending in this Ministry's Estimates. The schedule had been agreed to by the committee before this issue flared up two weeks ago. If that was all the consideration possible within that committee, Opposition Parties would have had perhaps an hour of questioning to try to talk, not only about the Ministry's general responsibilities but about this specific and very serious issue. I do not believe that less than one hour of questioning is adequate, even if the chairman of that committee permitted all questioning to focus on the issue of conflict of interest.

Does the Hon. Member think that is adequate? Is there not need for some other means of dealing with these matters if they are to be taken out of the House?

Mr. McGrath: No, Mr. Speaker, it would appear that two hours would not be adequate to deal with a matter as important as this. I refer my hon. friend to the new Standing Order 96(2) which sets out the permanent mandate of the standing committees. It is certainly within the framework of that mandate for the appropriate standing committee to continue with an examination of this issue after the time set aside for the examination of Estimates. That is the objective behind the new system. I believe and hope that it will work.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**SUSPENSION OF PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS ON ALLOTTED DAY**

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Danis): Earlier today the Government House Leader (Mr. Hnatyshyn) designated tomorrow, Tuesday, May 13, as an allotted day. Pursuant to Standing Order 38, therefore, the hour for Private Members' Business will be suspended.

Accordingly, in conformity with the statement made by the Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski) last Friday, I am instructing the Table Officers that the item on Private Members' Business standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) be dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence.

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[Translation]

SUPPLY**ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 82—GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION—ALLEGED CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition) moved: