

Business of the House

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member raises a very interesting question. It has been the subject, I am sure, of much conversation. I am prepared to consider the matter very carefully over the Christmas break. However, it does seem to me that when a question is put to a minister, the answer to which would result in one of the strongest and most clearly established breaches of privilege in the annals of that very narrowly defined procedural area, there is little sense in allowing the question to be put if the answer will clearly be that it is a budgetary matter, and if it were to be answered it would breach one of the most well established privileges of the House.

It might be preferable to allow such questions to be put on the narrow grounds that the minister can always say that he is not prepared to consider such matters. However, that seems to me to be most unlikely ground, and in fairness we should indicate to hon. members putting such a question whether the Minister of Finance is prepared to consider a cut in taxes. That is a question that has been the subject matter of rulings on both occasions. If the minister were to give an indication that such matters were being considered, his answer would have to be classified as a leak of budgetary considerations, which is a clear breach of privilege. Therefore, if the answer will result in an offence against the privileges of the House, it seems to me that the question should not be put. However, if there is a strong feeling about it, I can listen to other representations and perhaps consider them over the Christmas break.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: If Your Honour will be considering this matter over the Christmas vacation, I would mention that two of the instances in question related to requests for tax cuts; they sought an indication from the minister as to whether there would be tax cuts. I would remind Your Honour—and perhaps you will recall yourself—that certainly this is merely one option with respect to the economic circumstances of our country which was presented to the federal-provincial meeting by the Minister of Finance.

When the question was asked by the leader of the NDP and by the hon. member for York-Simcoe with respect to that possibility, it seemed to me to be in the context of whether or not it was an option that was being considered. In other words, the minister had the opportunity of saying either that it was, or was not, that there were other options, or elaborating on them. It seems to me that when there are serious economic matters that face our country, as there are today, these kinds of questions simply search out and seek clarification on the options that are available. The possibility is available to us, and it would not breach budgetary secrecy and the traditional privileges of hon. members would not be thereby affected.

So I simply make my observations in the knowledge that Your Honour will probably have thought of them himself. I simply wanted to raise them in case, by some oversight, you did not consider that aspect.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I should like to assure the House that the next time a question of this nature arises which does not invite a clear breach of parliamentary privilege and

which is not a representation, which is often the case—a question put in this form is in double jeopardy because usually it is a straightforward representation—I will give it careful consideration, and if I have any doubt perhaps I will postpone the question until three o'clock and listen to arguments as to whether or not the question is in order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

TRADE

PRESENTATION OF REPORT ON HOW TO IMPROVE BUSINESS—
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 41(2), I have the honour to present the report on how to improve business-government relations in Canada.

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HOLIDAYS ACT, 1976

MEASURE TO INSTITUTE JULY 1 AS "CANADA DAY"

Hon. John Roberts (Secretary of State) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-30, an act respecting certain holidays.

Motion agreed to, bill read the first time and ordered to be printed.

Mr. Speaker: When shall the said bill be read the second time?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: At the next sitting of the House?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

(Questions answered orally are indicated by an asterisk.)

Mr. Ralph E. Goodale (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 147, 340, 344, 636, 761, 918, 924, 937, 962, 963, 1,027, 1,039, 1,043, 1,057, 1,087 and 1,098.