

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, January 17, 1991

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to several petitions.

[*Editor's Note: See today's Votes and Proceedings.*]

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POINT OF ORDER

REQUEST FOR BRIEFINGS

Mr. Speaker: Statements by ministers.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, seeing no minister rise, I want to clarify a matter with the government House leader. Is it the government's intention that on appropriate days the Minister of National Defence will be making statements to keep the House and the people of Canada apprised of Canada's developments in the Persian Gulf?

It seems this would be an appropriate way, and perhaps the most simple way, to keep Canadians briefed on what is happening.

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I believe the Minister of National Defence has offered briefings to both parties this morning.

It would be my intention to discuss with the House leader of the New Democratic Party, as well as the opposition House leader, a means by which, on a daily basis, briefings could be held with appropriate representatives as well as to look at some mechanism whereby all members of Parliament could receive daily information on events in the Middle East. Perhaps it would be more appropriate if we had those discussions in private as the morning progresses and we can reach some mutually satisfactory arrangements.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders provide that every day a minister may make a statement to the House. I would have thought that the government, considering the seriousness of the situation, would be willing to come and give a summary of the situation, not only for the benefit of the House and its members but also for Canadians. I do not see why we have to sit down and negotiate arrangements beyond that.

That being said, Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Liberal caucus did indeed receive the offer of a briefing on the situation by the Minister of National Defence, to be given at 11.30 a.m. I thought it was possible for all members of my caucus to be there. However, it is impossible, Mr. Speaker, to be there today, since we are here in the House. Could I ask the minister to give us the assurance that every day there will be a minister's statement on the situation, a situation that is so important to us?

[*English*]

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, as we determine the appropriateness of communicating, not only with members of Parliament, as the government House leader has indicated, but also the people of Canada on a regular basis, the suggestion that perhaps a ministerial statement would be one way. There are other ways perhaps as well to apprise Canadians of the situation as it evolves.

These are very tense times, tense also in the House. Since we have arranged briefings for the caucuses later this morning at a time when the House is sitting—in a sense to our surprise—we need an assurance that the government would not produce any dilatory motions or