

*Government Orders*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I can assure the hon. member that a response will be forthcoming as quickly as possible. We do not feel at this time that it should prevent us from proceeding with debate.

The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

**Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Motion 30 which introduces significant, and in my view long overdue, changes to the rules under which this House operates.

[*Translation*]

Parliament's task is to debate issues and to make decisions and the Standing Orders of the House guide this process. They govern the proceedings of the House and establish a framework in which the government carries out its legislative program and the opposition questions the government in an orderly way and hon. members debate issues and make decisions by a majority vote.

The modification to the Standing Orders before Parliament is the result of a year of discussions and great co-operation among the House leaders. It is the most important series of changes proposed in the modern history of the Canadian Parliament.

The proposals seek the following objectives: to improve Parliament as a forum for good relevant debate through the modernization of obsolete and vague rules, a greater contribution from members to the parliamentary process, but also recognition of their obligations towards their constituents.

[*English*]

I want to talk about the public environment. Parliament and politicians are held in disrepute, and there is a heightened and dangerous sense of cynicism in the public of Canada concerning this institution, about which we should all be concerned. People are demanding more contact with members of Parliament and more involvement. The days when they were satisfied to have their representative act in their best interests in Parliament are long gone. They want now interaction on a more regular, routine basis.

• (1540)

We hear it exemplified by demands for referenda and recall elections. Free vote is a part of it. We hear incessantly that people want to have more impact, more

interaction and more influence on their members of Parliament. Some of that is healthy, some is not. The demand that we represent our parish, our constituency to the exclusion of every other interest is at this time quite dangerous because you hold a country like this together by accommodating the points of view in other parts of the country.

If we parliamentarians cannot see the other point of view, if a person like me from Alberta cannot appreciate the concerns of someone from Cape Breton, Newfoundland or Quebec and cannot participate or vote in concert with those colleagues, but is required by the exigencies of political pressure to say: "I vote in the affirmative only for those things which benefit Calgary and in the negative for everything else", then we are not serving the country very well. One cannot keep a country together like that, one cannot keep a family together like that. Yet we are hearing those demands.

I am not saying parliamentary rules are the source of all this public concern, but parliamentary rules cannot be excluded from it. Parliamentary actions and the reputation we have as parliamentarians are certainly a part of it. Therefore, we should approach the question of how we function, how the rules govern us, not just from the perspective of what it does for our partisan advantage in our adversarial system, but also what it does for the institution and for the country over the long haul.

The public is saying it wants more information and less rhetoric. It feels insulted in a lot of ways by what it sees here. I think we in Parliament have all experienced school kids visiting, sitting up in the gallery, watching us function and going away shaking their heads saying that if they acted like that in the classroom their teachers would discipline them severely.

I am not suggesting there is something wrong with this current group or that it is a reflection of who is on which side of the House, because it has been occurring frequently. Part of the problem is the way in which the public is informed. The vehicles used to inform the public do not work very well.

The March 25 CBC news item on the rule changes is perhaps a good example. It was clip-by-clip effort to give the viewers the message that the government is out to stifle Parliament. Nothing could be further from the truth. There were inaccuracies in that three-minute story, just plain factual inaccuracies. It is no wonder that no one understands Parliament when they are 50 feet off this hill.