

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Soetens: Mr. Speaker, as you can see I think we have had now four or five requests for rulings on your part on points of order that have not been points of order.

I might point out, Mr. Speaker, for your benefit as I advised you during the committee process, regarding this sanctimonious bunch opposite, demanding my neutrality, tradition has it in the House of Commons that when the Speaker is acting in his role as Speaker, this bunch does not go back to his riding and start attacking, challenging and saying all kinds of things about the Speaker.

I should point out that the Liberal Party, this group opposite, which is so sanctimonious in its presentation here in the House, while I was doing the job impartially as I could, was busy attacking me.

Mr. Volpe: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. On behalf of all Canadians who elected me and other members in this House who are very interested, in pursuing the debate at hand, I think this is an affront to all members of this House and to all Canadians who elected them that we engage in this kind of a debate where we are talking about simple partisanship in one's own riding. It does not stand the chairman of the committee well to engage in this kind of claptrap.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): It is not a point of order, it is a matter of debate.

Mr. Soetens: Mr. Speaker, you are certainly assisting very well in my making the point about just the way this group opposite behaved in the committee process. It used any excuse it could to prevent the committee from hearing witnesses.

I have to say there were a number of witnesses I would have loved to hear even though I had to sit there as a neutral chairperson. I think there were people out there who would have been able to give us some very valuable insights, some very good additional information that would have been useful to the committee, and we could have done that in the five, six or seven days of hearings that we could have had in the timeframe that we spent debating all kinds of things other than the legislation that was before us.

I think that is important because during the whole process, because of the fact that we had to restrict the list of witnesses, we were not able to bring before the committee a balance of witnesses.

For example, the opposition presented a witness from the United States, which was possible for all kinds of reasons. Professor Schondelmeyer was there. He presented I think a very well documented report. There were things in the report that others would clearly liked to have challenged, refuted, maybe presented an alternative opinion on but because of the process that the opposition forced on the committee we were only in many cases to hear very one-sided presentations; whether they be one-sided on behalf of the Liberal Party, one-sided on behalf of the New Democratic Party, or one-sided on behalf of the Conservative Party.

• (1340)

Unfortunately, the traditional roles that committees would normally have were truncated because of what was going on by the opposition members on the committee.

I stand here, understanding fully the traditions under which this House operates, and have to suggest that, yes, maybe I am straying from those traditions, not because I wanted to, but because the members opposite did their darndest, did their utmost, to stray from the traditions as I perceive them of the way a committee ought to operate.

I am sorry that they did that and sorry that the government had to respond the way it did. We could have had far more beneficial hearings.

What is happening in debate today? I have listened to some members opposite speak and they use some examples that come out of the committee process. I reference the cost of the drug plan. Whether it is \$4 billion or \$7 billion over the next 10 years or 20 years, it is just one of those examples.

There is clear evidence to refute much of what was presented by Dr. Schondelmeyer, simply because on the list of drugs that he had there were already quite a number, I believe 14 or 15, that already had compulsory licences issued against them. There was another group of 16 or 17 where the dates of the patent expiries were wrong. When presented with that information, the witness said: "I would be happy to correct that if I have an opportunity to study it". Unfortunately, the opportunity was not there because people opposite made it very difficult in the time frame for us to proceed with the legislation.