

Business of the House

I would like to ask before the government House leader and/or other House leaders, who sometimes get together in these little agreements, go too far on the agreements, whether the government is prepared to recognize the discrimination that was set out in the Lortie commission. It said that there was discrimination on tax receipts, because if candidates were not members of a registered party they could not give a tax receipt. That little amendment would put independents in the same position before an election. I understand the problem of independents springing up like mushrooms across the country and looking for the—

Mr. Speaker: The hon. minister will answer the member's question. The hon. member has asked a question. I will ask the government House leader to answer the question.

Mr. Andre: The committee that was studying the Lortie commission reached the quite sensible decision to bring forward by way of early legislation those things that would require the Chief Electoral Officer to spend an extended period of time to have them in place for the next election.

This first bill that is now before the House and has had second reading and committee study, and for which I am seeking report stage and third reading, deals primarily with those aspects. The second phase, which the committee is now actively working on, deals with the question of financing, receipts, limits, and so on. They have not completed their deliberations to my knowledge.

In any event it is not the government that is pushing one or the other. It really is a House of Commons initiative, and all parties are there representing their interests and discussions are going on. There is no government position that we established and asked our members on the committee to try to push in place.

• (1520)

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Annapolis Valley—Hants is a hard man to shout down. I am better at it when I do not have the microphone than when I do. I would just like to follow up with the government House leader who indicated two things.

First, he is not able to say what the business of the House will be past next Tuesday because he is looking forward to the discussions with House leaders on Tuesday. I would ask him this with respect to that. Is he prepared to give a commitment that pending those

discussions on Tuesday that he will not give notice of time allocation on the legislation having to do with the North American free trade agreement?

Second, with respect to the conflict of interest legislation, in particular, the government House leader should have acknowledged that we have made it clear to him that we would be willing to deal with this legislation speedily. We would only like two speakers but we would like to do it in the ordinary course of events.

If this is important legislation as the government says it is, we could deal with it this afternoon but that is not what the government called. There are many occasions on which we could have dealt with the conflict of interest legislation but the government has not called that particular bill.

It is not just a matter of House legislation. The legislation does not completely reflect the consensus in the committee. Therefore it is a matter of contention. Therefore it should be dealt with in the way that things are normally dealt with.

That is all we are asking. It could have been dealt with a long time ago if the government had not insisted on having a special evening sitting.

The same with electoral reform. We all know it is important. The government knows it is important and it refuses to put it on its own agenda and have the House deal with it. It could be dealt with at any time instead of trying to put through a bill that does not have to be dealt with till the fall, if ever it has to be dealt with, given what is happening in the United States with respect to NAFTA. There are things that need to be dealt with now. We could deal with them but the government insists on dealing with NAFTA.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in my earlier comment, the reality is because of the timetable and the fact that a lot of time was not spent in the most productive fashion earlier this year, we have a number of bills the failure of which to pass will result in the loss of tens and hundreds of millions of dollars to the taxpayers.

Is the hon. member suggesting that the penalty of having to actually sit and discuss a bill in the evening, something we used to do regularly, is so significant that in fact we should impose on the taxpayers these tens of millions of dollars of expenditures so as to not divert from this principle of actually sitting in the evening from eight o'clock to ten o'clock.