

Routine Proceedings

in reflecting the views of their constituents on critical issues of the day.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate having a chance to participate in this discussion on something that I think is most important. These are very critical times for our country. We feel the pressure in the country as members of Parliament. I suspect running up to the next number of months, to the next general election, those tensions will be perhaps even extended and expanded. I think we need a way to let off a little steam, to diffuse some of the anxiety and tensions that build up in here, Mr. Speaker, when, in a House that was designed for us to speak, so few people actually have an opportunity to speak on behalf of their constituents on issues of the day.

Mr. Albert Cooper (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to take much time but I do want to respond for a moment to the comments of my friends across the aisle.

The House leader for the Liberal Party makes four very clear and concise points which I have to say without repeating them I basically agree with. His points are valid ones. We want to see this sort of thing happen. We want to see discussion and debate among members of Parliament. But I want to draw a line here.

As you well know, and other members of this House know, we have a process in here essentially of the usual channels of discussions that go back and forth to create opportunities for dialogue, debate and how we are going to handle legislation. That process I have to say in 90 to 95 per cent of all cases works very effectively. Occasionally it fails, and that is bound to happen in a partisan institution such as the one all of us here participate in.

But the point I want to make is this: Looking at Standing Order 52, emergency debates, my hon. friend the Liberal House leader read citation 387 of Beauchesne in its entirety. I will not repeat the whole thing but I want to focus on one phrase. The Standing Order is clear that the question be specific and must require urgent consideration.

What my friends are arguing is that in fact what the Speaker should do is reinterpret the word "urgent", re-examine and loosen up what is considered an emergency to thereby create another opportunity for debate.

My argument is that would be an abuse of this rule because this rule is designed for a very specific purpose of emergency or urgency.

We can arrive at somewhat the same results by a different process and one that is more in keeping with our traditions and is safer for the institution. That is, Mr. Speaker, if you were to do as my colleagues are advocating, to broaden the scope, in a sense the Speaker would then replace the usual channels that we try to exercise in this House.

My argument is that through the process of usual channels we can create more opportunities for debate on matters that are significant, matters that are important, but not necessarily an emergency, not necessarily urgent in the sense that they have to be dealt with or solved at this particular moment.

The House leader for the New Democrats indicated a motion that we had passed unanimously in this House yesterday to create exactly such an opportunity on the issue of the Constitution. I have to say in the spirit of reform and the McGrath task force that was referred to earlier, that is in fact what we want to accomplish. We need to see more of those. On both sides of the House members want to participate in these issues.

My argument is this: Very simply, if the Speaker were to take it upon himself or herself to reinterpret the word "emergency" or "urgency" as it has applied to this particular rule, it puts the Speaker in somewhat of a vulnerable position and is a role best left to the usual channels.

I want to signal that role is one that I think we should be looking at in the spirit of generosity and in terms of the mood and tone we are trying to bring into the House of Commons. That is one of a serious institution which has contained in it serious people who want to seriously address serious issues. It is one where we set aside our gamesmanship from time to time and really get down and give our members on both sides of the House an opportunity to discuss this issue.

Mr. Dingwall: I say through the Chair to my hon. colleague this is not intended to cause the debate undue delay. I do want to say to my colleague, as he well knows, there are a number of elements the Chair must consider before making an adjudication with regard to Standing Order 52.