

*Government Orders*

the notion that tonight on this very important issue, we can debate between six o'clock and midnight. Six extra hours of freedom of speech is all the government is asking for. Mr. Speaker, would you please ask the House if there is unanimous consent for that motion?

**Mr. Gauthier:** Mr. Speaker, my friend from Calgary West knows the rules very well. Standing Order 26(1) and (2) says that a member must have the floor and be in his seat. The member for Calgary West did not have the floor. We are on comments and questions so the member does not have the floor when we have that kind of a situation. The member for Calgary West is not seeking anything. He is just trying to play politics again.

If he comes in here at 5.55 p.m. or from four to five this afternoon and puts that motion to the House, we will deal with it then.

**Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing):** Mr. Speaker, I will try to be a little more constructive than the last speaker and deal with the motion that is before the House in both some general introductory terms and in some specifics.

As a relatively new member to the House of Commons, I came, as most new members, expecting the debate to be meaningful, the government to listen, to respond to constructive suggestions and criticisms, and not only to listen to us but to listen to the Canadian people.

That does not happen. There is no sign of it happening. These rule changes will make it even more difficult for those of us who are bringing forward these arguments to have the opportunity to put pressure on the government and to hopefully get it to change its mind.

Since 1988 the government has disregarded accumulated parliamentary practice and has unilaterally changed the way the House of Commons operates. It has made routine the use of closure and time allocation by which debate is curtailed and bills are forced through the House. Closure was used as we all know only 21 times between 1913 and 1988 and yet it has been used 13 times in the last three years by this government.

In addition, by stacking the Senate, by using closure illegally in committee, the Conservative government has

changed Parliament from a forum for debating and amending government proposals to a legislative rubber stamp. That is why the Canadian public finds Parliament difficult to understand, because the government is not responding to arguments which are presented, arguments which the Canadian public support.

On March 25, as we all know, the government House leader presented a new Conservative vision of Parliament contained in the 64 amendments to the Standing Orders that we are discussing today. Individually, these sweeping changes range from the relatively trivial to the totalitarian. Collectively, they will shut down Parliament and shut out its members from any meaningful legislative role.

Canadians want changes to Parliament. There is no doubt about that. They want parliamentary reform. They are fed up with the Parliament which fails to respond to their needs or reflect their concerns. Sometimes they are embarrassed by some of the behaviour such as that we just heard from members and senators. They are angered by the indifference of governments and the inability of their elected representatives to effect change.

But these changes, the changes proposed by the government House leader, will not deal with the real concerns that Canadians have about the operation of Parliament. These proposals are designed to preserve the quickly eroding authority of the government which is within 11 votes, as we know, of losing its parliamentary majority.

• (1320)

Many of the proposed changes have the goal of keeping the House closed whenever possible. After all, when Parliament does not sit, government cannot be defeated. By reducing the number of sitting days to 135 from 175, the government is cutting two further months from the parliamentary calendar. For 24 weeks a year there will be no opportunity for Question Period, no opportunity for regular press activities and questioning of MPs and leaders, no committee hearings and no ability to debate or question government policies. In short, there will be no accountability. The government will escape the scrutiny of the House for almost half of the year.