

Point of Order

An Hon. Member: It is important.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, it is an important issue and I have the arguments. The hon. member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing.

Mr. Chris Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr Speaker, I was intending to be brief. The government House leader raised a number of interesting questions on Tuesday. Specifically he asked for the Chair's guidance on whether or not the Senate amendments were in order, whether they would have been in order if first introduced in the House, and whether the acceptance of the Senate amendments would not constitute a defeat of the original government bill and thus raise a question of confidence.

I would like to reiterate the comments of my party's House leader. I find the logic odd on the part of the government. When the first message came from the Senate, as we have heard, no procedural questions were raised on the floor by the government and the government proceeded to frame its reply, which was then forced through the House on closure.

The question arises then: Can the Speaker find a message from the other place to be out of order? I had not thought it possible for our Chair to assume that responsibility, but if you do, Mr. Speaker, it raises interesting consequential questions.

For example, could the Speaker of the Senate similarly find a message from this place to be out of order? Could a decision of the Speaker of the Senate to find a message from this place in order be overturned by a Senate majority? In other words, by an extension of the logic, the Senate majority could perhaps use procedural manoeuvres to defeat government bills which arrive there.

Second, is it a question of confidence in the government for the House to consider Senate amendments which go against, in the government's view, the principle of a particular bill? Perhaps it is. I would like to support the contentions made by my hon. friend from Kingston and the Islands with regard to the nature of the bill and its relationship to being a money bill. It is not a money bill in the usual sense. It does not raise taxes. It does not increase government expenditures. In fact it does not spend government money. Rather, it is a reduction. Perhaps that is the best way to put it.

If the bill were defeated, could there be a question of confidence in the House? The Senate has defeated bills which were more obviously money bills than is Bill C-21. In fact, I believe it was a Conservative dominated Senate which defeated the first old age pension bill many years ago, but was it a question of confidence in the government? No, Mr. Speaker.

Essentially, I think you will find that the arguments of my hon. friend, the government House leader, are with the other place and not at all with anything which you are empowered to do here in this House. If the government has difficulties with the constitutional powers given the Senate, I would invite it to address those concerns in the normal manner and it may even find support from this side of the House on meaningful Senate reform. My hon. colleague, the government House leader knows well, as do we all, that you as Speaker of our House are not authorized to rule on legal or constitutional matters.

I have a few very short observations. First, it should be well understood that the government has several options before it in replying to the message from the Senate concerning the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act. I will just refer to one as you indicated that you did not want to hear a long list of the options the government has.

Of course the government has the option to accept the Senate amendments and need not ask you to rule them out of order in order to save it the embarrassment of voting them down. I would add parenthetically that the Senate amendments reflect the Liberal position on the unemployment insurance bill and are not endorsed by our party.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that under such circumstances as we are finding ourselves in presently with the operation of Parliament Canadians are looking for other avenues to raise their grievances. I think the dilemma facing my hon. colleague is largely of his own government's making. It is incumbent on the government to recognize the seriousness of these circumstances and to respond appropriately. The issue is not to raise unnecessary points of order but to listen to Canadians.

Mr. Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for succinctly wrapping up the arguments of his party. I know he will extend my compliments to the hon. mem-