

*Privilege*

I do want to suggest that one of the difficulties that comes up from time to time in this House relating to questions is that we do have the 45-day limit. We understand that and certainly I can say from this side of the House that we try as much as possible to meet those deadlines.

However, from time to time there are questions that are very difficult to answer in that time frame. I am referring specifically to those information requests that seek information from all departments or agencies. It takes a great deal of time, money, energy and effort in order to achieve an answer within the 45-day period.

I understand the hon. member's frustration. That is why we put in place Standing Order 39(5)(a) and (5)(b) on recent changes to the rule. Standing Order 39(5)(a) says:

A Member may request that the Ministry respond to a specified question within forty-five days by so indicating when filing his or her question.

That of course is what my hon. friend is referring to.

However, subsection (b) says:

If such a question remains unanswered at the expiration of the said period of forty-five days, the Member who put the question may rise in the House under "Questions on Order Paper", and give notice that he or she intends to transfer the question and raise the subject-matter thereof on the adjournment of the House.

In other words, I understand the hon. member's frustration when he asked four questions which have plugged up his opportunity to put questions in place. He too has an option, a way that he can relieve that pressure by raising the issue, not shoving it under the carpet, at the latter part of the day and having that issue dealt with here in the House of Commons.

I understand his frustration. If my memory serves me right, I answered Question No. 110 this morning, which was another question that was put by the hon. member. It was a little late, I agree. We have tried as much as we could to meet the concerns of the hon. member and that is why that question was answered today.

In summary, I do not believe that the hon. member has a point of privilege. He has another option which is very clear under our Standing Orders. I would encourage him, when we are unable to meet the deadline, to feel free to transfer it for debate and we will be happy to co-operate.

**Mr. Boudria:** Mr. Speaker, very quickly, I just want to indicate to you that it is true that a Standing Order is

breached. That does not mean that it is a point of order. When a Standing Order is breached in such a way that it prevents me from doing my work as a member of Parliament, I submit that I do have a point of privilege.

Furthermore, the answer that the parliamentary secretary gave is that I had the option, when I did not get an answer after 45 days, of basically withdrawing the question, as the member for Hamilton East has said, with a seven-minute debate.

That is not the point. I am entitled to get an answer, and the rules do not provide a way for the government to weasel out or not to provide an answer. The rules are clear: the government must answer. Nothing in the rules say that the government has the option of not answering. It is not there. That is why it is important for us as parliamentarians to have this rule followed.

Here is the question I have been asking since September 16, just to give an example of how easy the question would be to answer within a period of time. I have asked for the hospitality budgets of each deputy minister. There are only 35 of them. How long could it possibly take to give that answer? It might take 15 minutes, it might take half an hour, but certainly not five months.

**Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that when this rule was brought in, the rule of the 45-day limit, the understanding was that in return for allowing only four questions to be on the Order Paper at any given time there would be this guarantee of an answer in 45 days.

The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader knows that and it is not enough to get up and give excuses. These questions are not being asked by anybody. These questions are being asked by members of Parliament who are elected to ask these questions and the government is bound by the Standing Orders to answer those questions within the prescribed time set in the Standing Orders.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that you should find that it is your responsibility and the House's responsibility to make the government follow the Standing Orders in this case, and no excuses allowed.

**Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier):** Mr. Speaker, having been part of the discussions in prior incarnations as a Whip and as a House leader of this party, I just want to recall an incident that I think is useful.