

be perfectly prepared to pass that part of the bill immediately and, indeed, it could have had Royal Assent four weeks ago tomorrow.

**Senator Flynn:** That is not the case, because the bill would have to be returned to the House of Commons and the House, in fact, passed the whole bill.

**Senator Kirby:** The fact of the matter is, Senator Flynn, that the first part of this bill would have cleared this house four weeks ago. The fact is that, had the first part of that bill gone back to the House of Commons where, according to Senator Flynn a moment ago, it had received unanimous consent, it would have received Royal Assent long ago and all of the issues which the Leader of the Government in the Senate insisted upon raising today—and I will deal with them in a moment—would have been totally irrelevant.

There has been no willingness to understand that fact, and no acceptance publicly of the fact by the government, and certainly no acceptance by government spokesmen in this chamber that they could have had Part I a long time ago.

Therefore, if one looks at that sequence of events, one must look beyond them and ask: Why is it that the government members in this house have been unwilling to offer any element of compromise?

I think Senator Hicks gave a very good description of what he called the 180 degree turnaround—what Senator Haidasz earlier today called the flip-flop; what Senator Stewart so very carefully documented in terms of statements made in the past by a variety of current government ministers, all the way from the Deputy Prime Minister, to the current Minister of Finance, to the current Minister of Energy, to the current Minister of Employment and Immigration, and on and on. All of those people, who are now government ministers, argued a position based on a matter of principle. Their matter of principle was that there should be no passage of borrowing authority prior to the tabling of the estimates.

● (21:30)

In fact, if one goes back to the quotation Senator Stewart gave earlier today, the current Minister of Finance argued that not only should there be estimates, but there should also be a budget. So, the fact of the matter is that if one looks back at the history of this issue and the position on it as taken by government spokesmen when they were in opposition, one finds a long history of their arguing the exact position that the current members of the opposition in the Senate have been arguing at the committee meeting and in this chamber today.

**Senator Flynn:** No!

**Senator Kirby:** I have been fascinated by the remarks Conservative senators have made when they alluded in a variety of ways to the fact that the expression by all of us of our views on this issue, and indeed the expression of the majority view, in some way threatens the existence of the Senate. I should like to echo what Senator Hicks has said in that regard, which was, that if this is such a fragile institution that this expression of views on a matter of a principle—as

[Senator Kirby.]

very clearly set out by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, by Senator Stewart, Senator Sinclair and others over a period of only four weeks—is a problem, then this is a very fragile institution indeed. Let me remind you that this has not been going on for six months or for a year; the delay has only been a four week one. We were first given the bill just four weeks ago. If this delay is sufficient to cause a number of senators to start talking about the ultimate demise of this institution, then I think we need to have a far more fundamental debate, and question whether this institution ought to be here at all.

**Some Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear.

**Senator Kirby:** The fact of the matter is that even when the Conservative Party was in a minority position—not in a majority position—in the other place and made their arguments on the matter of principle I have just discussed, the government of the day accepted those arguments, accepted their position in principle, and modified its position so that in fact—

**Senator Flynn:** It did in the present case in the other place.

**Senator Kirby:** Senator Flynn, as usual you are making my point far better than I can.

**Senator Flynn:** That is not difficult.

**Senator Kirby:** The fact of the matter is that even when the Conservative Party was in a minority position in the other place, their will prevailed, and that became the ultimate view of Parliament.

Having said that, and having seen that view prevail from a minority party, I find it unbelievably strange that the same spokesmen should do the 180 degree turnaround that Senator Hicks has talked about, or the flip-flop that Senator Haidasz has talked about, and should suddenly argue that the majority view should not prevail here, and that the matter of principle should be abandoned.

Having thought about that, I suppose I really should not be all that surprised because over the past six months we have seen some remarkable flip-flops by the government on a whole variety of issues. I cannot help but mention in passing the notion that universality, which was a sacred trust last summer, suddenly became an issue for discussion by October, and ultimately in the face of strong public opposition, that position changed.

I cannot help but recall reading statements made by a number of government spokesmen when they were in opposition regarding open government, and now watching the incredible way in which the arguments for open government have turned into arguments for closed government and managed news since the government changed.

I suppose I should not be too surprised that on the issue we are dealing with today a flip-flop has occurred. It was to be expected. I suppose that that is simply the kind of government we will be faced with for the next four years.

**Senator Flynn:** Four years!