

*Business of the House*

I want to take this opportunity to designate immediately, Wednesday, January 14, as an allotted day. Once again, if we have completed study of Bill C-48 before January 12, we can then proceed with Bill C-24 relating to fiscal transfers to the provinces.

[English]

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** Madam Speaker, with respect to the Customs Act, I understand there may be a requirement later for an order with regard to the reference to the standing committee. That is quite in order. It is my expectation that we will be able to complete consideration of that bill in the House as the hon. gentleman has indicated.

**Mr. Knowles:** Madam Speaker, there are one or two points concerning which the government House leader stated that there has been agreement. I should like to confirm those arrangements. First, with respect to Bill C-50, the bill having to do with the Customs Act, it is agreed there will be only one speaker per party at second reading. It is also agreed that after second reading the bill can be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs instead of to Committee of the Whole. I also confirm the agreement that if consideration of Bill C-48 is completed some time tomorrow and a vote is called for, the taking of that recorded vote will be deferred until we return in January.

While I am on my feet and while we are dealing with House business, I should like to make two or three suggestions to the government House leader. I make them very urgently. After today's discussion, surely he must realize that the House will be expecting some economic measures in January to deal with the situation the country faces. I hope that serious consideration will be given to that fact by the government.

Second, I hope that some time early in the new year the freedom of information legislation will be brought forward. That has been dangled before the House and the country for a long time. It is time for action on that piece of legislation.

My third suggestion to the government House leader is that he talk very seriously to the Acting Minister of Veterans Affairs about bringing in the necessary legislation to shorten the phasing-in period in the act under which widows of disabled veterans get pensions. That six and a half year phasing-in period is one that all of us in this House dislike. I hope we can look forward to that phasing-in period being eliminated, or at least shortened, early in the new year.

**Mr. Pinard:** Madam Speaker, when Parliament was called back early in October we publicly stated that we wanted to deal with three major issues facing the country, namely, the constitution, the economy, and energy. That is what we have been doing since then and what we intend to do when we return January 12. That is why I stated we will again deal with the energy bill if debate is not completed tomorrow. Following the energy bill, we will have budget bills and tax measures. As the hon. member well knows, we will also deal with the constitution. When the resolution comes back from committee, the House will deal with that as well.

I say to the hon. member that we will continue dealing with legislation related to the major issues in the country, as we have done since returning in October. Beginning January 12, we will therefore deal with the energy bill, budget bills, and, in February, the constitution. In so far as access to information is concerned, I have said before, and I repeat, that we are willing to bring that bill before the House for discussion if we can have an assurance that the bill will be sent to committee after a very short period, that is, less than one day's debate. I am certain the NDP will agree to that. However, there were indications on the floor of the House that the Tory party, as is their right, will have more than one speaker. I have no assurance that this will get to committee within a day. It is very difficult for the government to cope with energy matters, economic matters and the constitution and, at the same time, deal with some of the other bills on the order paper.

Finally, in so far as the hon. member's request with regard to veterans is concerned, I know he has directed these questions to the minister responsible. I will talk with the minister and see what he has to say on this subject.

**Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):** Madam Speaker, with respect to the reference to the freedom of information bill, or access to information as it is called, I will avail myself of this opportunity to speak to the accusation that somehow or other we may be unreasonable. I hope that was not in the mind of the government with respect to speakers. I indicated on the floor of the House that we would agree to a short debate, but not limited to one day or one round of speakers. If I recall correctly, I think I said there would possibly be five speakers from our party. That remains the case today.

It should be made clear that the bill introduced by this government is different in two ways from Bill C-15, which I had the pleasure of introducing, and which was given approval. First, it combines two things, it combines freedom of information or access to information and a bill with respect to privacy. It is a much more expanded bill.

The other significant difference is that, notwithstanding the existence of the judicial review concept in it, by virtue of the wording and the broadening of the exemptions, this bill marks a return to rather than a retreat from, ministerial discretion. We want to use the short debate prior to the bill going to committee to outline to the government and the country where this bill differs, and where the cause of freedom of information is not served as well as it could have been by the other bill. I want that to be quite clear because it is important to those groups in the country and in this House who are interested in access to information.

**Mr. Pinard:** Madam Speaker, I repeat that the freedom of information or access to information bill and the second reading stage of it are under discussion. There will be other stages where the bill will be studied, and where there may be 40-minute speeches. If the Conservative party has five more speakers with 40 minutes each, that will represent much more debate at a preliminary stage. We are willing to discuss an agreement to shorten speeches so that the bill can be sent to