

Routine Proceedings

in any way whatsoever. It is of sufficient importance that two parties in this House and other members have spoken to this particular issue and have requested it. It is in keeping with the concept of reform maybe not to the letter of reform, but certainly in the spirit of reform, and it would provide an avenue for all members of Parliament to make that claim to the Chair.

I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to raise those points. I believe I have kept within the timeframe I indicated to you yesterday, that I would be no longer than five minutes on an issue which I believe is important, not only for our deliberations here today, but indeed in the subsequent weeks and months ahead.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, on the same point, I wish to add two or three short comments to the points made by my hon. friend.

• (1030)

I want to begin by suggesting right from the beginning that in no way are my comments to be taken as a criticism of past decisions that Speakers have made regarding debates under Standing Order 52. After all, one of the restrictions is that it must be a genuine emergency. What we are asking, Mr. Speaker, is for you to perhaps place a slightly different interpretation on that term "genuine emergency" than has been placed on it in the past. Perhaps we could have an undertaking to work on a definition in the future.

I simply want to say that Parliament means "to speak" and if there is one thing that has become clear over the last little while, whether it is the Spicer report or what we hear from our constituents, it is that they want us to speak on issues of relevance to them.

We have an opportunity to speak to legislation but often that is part of the ongoing business of the country. Often people feel that it is not necessarily a priority in their minds but something that is obviously very important and what we must do. Of course, we are always held to the relevancy of the bill or motion before us.

There is also the fact that during Question Period, which is the other obvious opportunity, we are restricted in making very short statements in a matter of seconds and, of course, during questions, you are always remind-

ing us that this is not a forum for debate, but in fact a forum to pose a question. So we are limited there.

What we are doing tonight as a result of all-party agreement is providing some hours to allow members of Parliament, in a sense, to report back on behalf of their constituents as to their views and concerns regarding the constitutional proposals. I think it is a very positive and very progressive initiative that the House has taken.

There is a growing sentiment that people want us to respond to the important issues of the day. They want to see this institution being responsive to what I think we would all agree are critical issues facing the country. My hon. friend, the House leader for the Official Opposition has mentioned the matter of supply management. We agree that this is a critical issue confronting us. I suspect that all members of the House, from whatever region, from whatever political party, acknowledge the fact the decision that will soon be made regarding the whole matter of marketing boards and supply management programs is very critical.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you would look at this obviously and say: "Is this a genuine emergency?" We look back at precedents and are reminded that when the Tiananmen Square incident occurred, we agreed it was an emergency and we had a debate that night. However, when we had the major cutbacks to VIA Rail or the collapse of the fishery, they were not considered immediate emergencies and consequently, there were no emergency debates around these issues in spite of requests from various members and rightfully so. In no way am I criticizing the decision because I think when you saw that although these were serious issues and members would have liked to have made comments, they were not genuine emergencies at that particular moment.

I would like to add my voice to that of my colleague and say we have to find some way to provide an opportunity that will not jeopardize the House time in its efforts to do business because I think that we acknowledge the fact the government has an agenda; the business of the land must be conducted. Perhaps loosening up on our interpretation of the emergency debate will allow this institution to be more responsive to the concerns and needs of the country, to provide members of Parliament with an opportunity to be more responsive