

*Government Orders*

We do not get that perspective on bills introduced in the House by hearing from technical witnesses. We get it from hearing from people who have knowledge, insight, and thoughtful analysis to bring to us on the purpose of a bill, on the implications of that bill and on the long-term effects and when we do that job conscientiously.

Numerous times in this House and in committees I have seen bills being put through a review by a committee which includes members of all parties and coming back to this House stronger and better. It is wrong to disrupt that process and to say that our only purpose is to look for the technical aspects of a bill and to hear from technical witnesses.

Legislative committees perform an important role. It is very clear from the fact that the Environmental Assessment Act went off to a legislative committee and has not come back to us that the inadequacies of that bill have become evident through that examination; not through an examination of the technical aspects of the bill, but of the implications for how well it does its job to protect the environment of Canada from now into the next century. It is evident that members of the committee have concluded that it does not do that job very well. That is why that bill is not back. That is why inevitably that bill will die before the next Parliament. The government itself through that examination has recognized that it is an inadequate bill.

The government wants to stifle the ability of the opposition to set the agenda in Parliament and to bring forward issues that are of concerns to Canadians that the government chooses not to bring forward. We do that through opposition days, as the members opposite know, where we the opposition parties get to choose the topic of the day and to put forward a motion. It is a rare opportunity, but it does happen. Now the occasions on which we will be able to do that are limited.

I want to talk about closure.

The word Parliament indicates that we are here to speak on behalf of our constituents. Yet, in this session alone this government has used closure to limit debate more often than any government since Confederation. In fact I believe in the first year of its mandate it used closure more often than all governments since Confederation.

That is stifling the ability of my constituents and the constituents in every riding across this country to be heard in the Parliament of their country. It is their Parliament; it is not our Parliament. That is what should guide our decisions as to how this House operates.

My colleague has talked about the implication for employees of the House of Commons. I have not heard one member of the government address that issue. I suspect that is the last thing that was given any consideration when these changes to the orders were brought in and the government decided that it was more convenient for its members not to be here every fourth week. The last thing it thought about was the several thousand people who work on this Hill to make our work possible and what it would do to disrupt their lives, their working conditions, probably even the amount of remuneration they receive in many cases.

**Mr. Belsher:** Parliament is not here for their lives.

**Ms. Copps:** He does not care. "Parliament is not here for their lives" is what he said.

**Mrs. Catterall:** The member opposite can say that he does not care about their lives. Any responsible employer cares about the lives of its employees, their ability to live a decent life, to make a decent living, but this government does not.

I want to close by talking about making the Government of Canada irrelevant. I spoke to a group of immigrants last week and they said: "Why do we have a government that seems intent on tearing things down instead of building things?"

I said: "That is your impression because the only government you have ever known in this country is the government we have now" That is not the kind of government we have always had in Canada. We have had governments that build. We have had governments that provide, that bring in pensions for seniors, that start a medicare system. We have had governments that built railways across this country because that is the only way to build a nation and built a national broadcasting system. Yet, we have seen a government now that seems determined to tear down the infrastructure that holds this country together from ocean to ocean to ocean.

We can think of the magic of a handful of people in the eastern part of this continent actually having the temerity to think that they could build a nation over a period of