
Members Look at Parliamentary Reform

by Clifford Lincoln, MP; Rob Merrifield, MP; Stéphane Bergeron, MP;
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On March 21, 2001, Government House Leader, Don Boudria, introduced a motion to establish a Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of the Procedures of the House of Commons. Consisting of the Deputy Speaker as Chairman and the House Leaders of the five parties represented in the Commons, the committee was instructed to report by June 2001. It was agreed that no changes would be made to the Standing Orders without the unanimous consent of all members of the Committee. Following speeches by the House Leaders a number of private members of Parliament outlined their ideas in a debate which lasted until well past midnight. The following are slightly edited extracts from that debate:

Clifford Lincoln (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): The most traditional institutions such as churches and monarchies are becoming democratic today because they realize they have to be closer to the people. They have to live with the times. However, parliament is stuck in tradition.

Here is one small example. When the Speaker rises, the three pages required to sit at his feet rise as well. If he sits, they sit. What is the point of all this? think it is symptomatic of a tradition that, today, is completely outmoded, undemocratic and does not improve the life of the pages who come here.

I think about our colleagues here. Do we call them by name? No. We speak of "the hon. member for Bellechasse-Etchemins-Montmagny-L'Islet" or of "the hon. member for Hastings-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington".

I have been to many parliaments where people call each other by their names. It is no sin to call someone Smith or Tremblay. They get to know each other. The irony of this place is that in the Chamber I am an hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis. When I get to a committee I am Lincoln. What sense does that make? If it is good for a committee, why should it not be good here? I find that in committee I can put a name and a face to people. There is a certain human bond that develops. I would like to be able to call the member for Regina-Qu'Appelle by name.

It would be far friendlier than calling him by his riding name.

As for votes, I really believe very deeply that our system of calling all votes confidence votes, with free votes being the exception, should be reversed. All votes should be free votes except for confidence votes.

I will just give a few figures from the British House which I gleaned some time ago. In the British House of Commons, dissenting votes have been a significant fact of life for a long time. In the seventies dissenting votes accounted for 25% of all voting divisions in the British parliament. In the first session of 1983-1987, when the Tories were in power, 62 divisions took place in which 137 Tory backbenchers cast a total of 416 votes against the government.

Here that would be viewed as heresy because any type of expression that is contrary to the wish of the government is seen as disloyalty. I do not see it as disloyalty. I see it as intelligence. I see it as being accountable to my conscience and to my electors. I separate completely confidence votes, which are a fact of life and must be for the government, from the rest of the votes where we could vote very freely and the government would carry on all the same, and be no worse for it.

With regard to a code of ethics, in 1997 the present Speaker, the member for Kingston and the Islands, was

co-chair of a committee that produced a code of official conduct for senators and members of parliament. Some of the members here were part of that committee. The report is still lying on the shelf. Why can we not institute that code of official conduct for all members and for senators? Why can we not make this official? Why can we not have a counsellor responsible to the Parliament of Canada? I do not see any reason why this should not become a part of the rules that govern our conduct as parliamentarians. That should be an essential and a prompt reform to institute.

When we talk about private members' bills, for six years I have had private members' bills that have just stayed in the draw. Recently I won. By magic my name got drawn, like the 6/49. Then I appeared before a committee and it decided that the bill was not important enough to be votable. So for one hour I had a little debate here and the bill died.

I look again at what happens in the British parliament. The differences are striking. In the British parliament, during the years 1983-1987, out of 415 private members' bills introduced in the British House, 70 of them were given royal assent, or 17%.

In our parliament, between May 13, 1991 and February 2, 1996, 428 private members' bills were introduced. Out of those, 163 were selected and only eight became statutes. Only 5% of bills were selected and a mere 2% became statutes. These bills made lacrosse and hockey national games and silly things like that. Very few items of substance are ever made into statutes.

All private members' bills should be made votable. We should have enough help to put private members' bills through. Admittedly let us have a limit on private members' bills. It could be one per member. I do not care. However let us have a chance to debate them.

I also believe that committees should be much freer. I am quite happy as the chair of a committee today to see my position being voted upon by my colleagues. I also believe that during the examination of legislation committees should be very free and open. Parliamentary secretaries should sit as expert witnesses for committees rather than be part of a committee.

I was in the National Assembly of Quebec as a minister. I had to appear as a minister to defend my legislation right through. I know the task of ministers is sometimes impossible. Therefore let the parliamentary secretary take over that function rather than sit as a member of the committee during the study of legislation.

I also believe the Board of Internal Economy in the House of Commons should be made more open. Certainly I do not disparage the members who sit on the board with great diligence and conscience. However it should be made far more open.

Committee chairs from day to day do not quite know how their budgets will be met. Halfway through the year they have to beg for another travel allowance. There should be far more input by members of the committees, chairs of the committees and House members.

We have a lot of reform to do. I would love to talk about other items such as electoral reform and the powers of the executive office, but I sincerely believe we have to start somewhere. Within the standing orders I think we can make reforms to parliament that will not make me less a Liberal, less a part of a government or less a part of an opposition if I were voted into opposition.

I will fight very hard for the things I believe in. At the same time I will feel empowered. I will feel dignified as a member of parliament. I will feel that the little intelligence I have been given, the little creative powers I have been given, have a chance to be expressed and find their way forward rather than just be there for duty times, for votes when I am supposed to vote a certain way, and be there always as a backbencher.

Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance):

The House of Commons, as far as I am concerned, has to return to the people of Canada. The rights and responsibilities of members of parliament to represent the views of their constituents has disappeared. The government seems much more concerned about maintaining power than representing the will of the people.

I took my seat here only a few short months ago and I have already come to recognize, despite the efforts of hard-working individuals from all sides of the House, that this place is no more than a voting machine. Last night I witnessed 16 motions being voted on in a few minutes, rubber stamp laws that were mainly drawn up by unelected bureaucrats from the Prime Minister's office.

It is up to the members of parliament, the government and the opposition to take parliament back.

I came here believing that I could offer some constructive input on pressing legislation and engage in serious debate on important issues. Instead, I saw an example yesterday of where we turned our back on a very important issue, the agriculture crisis. Many members were not even allowed to debate it. However, we can go all night tonight on this one.

We are controlled by the Prime Minister. My grandfather fought in both world wars. He went to war defending the rights of democracy so that we could stand in the House today to debate. He fought for freedom. Young men and women, aged 18, 19 and 20 years old, gave up their lives so that we could be here to debate. It is sad for me to think that the people of Canada have been conquered by a dictator without a shot being fired.

We can change that by free votes. We can work toward reforming parliament. There are a lot of things that have been talked about today, all of them very worthy of note, but for me the greatest change would come with the free vote of every member in the House, because it is up to us to vote the will of the people who sent us here.

Have governments forgotten that only four short months ago the citizens of the country elected each one of us to our seats? In four short months we have forgotten who we represent. We need to shift how government works and to be responsive to those who put us here.

We are bribing Canadians with their own tax dollars, and there is wasteful spending on unnecessary programs and unaccountable government. Cabinet is barking to the tune of the bureaucrats and special interest groups. Free votes will set us on a path for parliamentary reform and that is a path that we need to get on really quickly as far as I am concerned.

A real interesting concept is that government members believe that if the government introduces a bill that is defeated or if an opposition bill, motion or amendment is passed it would bring down the government and they would have to resign. It is beyond me where that idea comes from. It is archaic.

Liberal backbenchers have been forced into something that the Prime Minister wants. He has been bullying them around, but bullies are only powerful as long as no one stands up to them and no one really challenges them or thinks around their bullying.

I know that the hon. members across the way are truly hard working people. I have talked to many of them. Now is their chance to stand up. They can do something for Canada that is beyond anything they have done to this point.

There are 301 members elected to the House of Commons. We have the power to implement change. We set the rules. We were entrusted to make the laws of this country. I am not asking members to vote for something they do not believe in, but I will not be holding my breath that the Prime Minister will come through that door any time soon, unmuzzle the backbenchers and allow free votes in this place.

As democratically elected members of parliament, we do have the power to make the change. We could make it as early as tomorrow morning, if we had the political will to do so, by passing a motion that we truly have free votes in this place. All it would take is 30 Liberal backbenchers to live up to their potential and to influence government in a way they have never influenced it before. That is all it would take. We could change Canada and never go back. That is how easy it could be.

I do not believe in blaming the bureaucrats. I believe it is our duty. We need to do something about it and we

need to do it soon. Backbench MPs have that potential to be more than just voting machines. I would challenge them to do it, to be more, because they owe it to themselves and they owe it to this country.

Right after the election of November 27, 2000, I came to Ottawa with a few MPs for orientation. They were from all sides of the House. We were excited. We had just been given the opportunity to change Canada, to lead Canada, to make a difference in this country. As I talked to the other MPs, they said they were excited about the concept of a free vote. They thought it was something they could and should do. It is interesting now to see how they have fallen victim to the system and have thrown away their ideals and their principles.

I am calling on every member of the House to live up to the vision of the founding fathers and to vote for a motion to allow free votes, because members owe it to this country. It is the greatest country in the world and we need to protect it. We can do it and we should do it now.

Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères-Les-Patriotes, BQ): I am very pleased to take part in this debate pursuant to Standing Order 51(1). Its purpose is to ensure that we are able to debate in this House any matter relating to the reform of the standing orders, consolidate the achievements that we deem appropriate and make the changes we feel advisable to make so that this House can be a modern parliamentary institution and meet the expectations of our fellow citizens.

In that regard, I would say that we are becoming increasingly aware of a certain cynicism among the public, a loss of confidence in political institutions and, more generally, in the men and women chosen to sit in this very House.

On April 21, 1998 a similar debate was held in this House under the same Standing Order 51(1). Unfortunately, however, it did not result in any changes to the standing orders. This time I trust the debate will not be in vain, that it will not be pointless, and that we will be able to see a sensible outcome leading to substantial amendments to the standing orders so that they will be brought more into line with the expectations of the people of Canada and of Quebec about what a representative political institution should be.

Unfortunately, we have not used the standing orders to make the changes to the electoral and parliamentary system we ought to have made. It is to be hoped that the process put in place through this committee will produce some results. I hope that this committee on modernisation of the rules will show the necessary transparency to enable us to achieve results fulfilling not only the expectations of our fellow citizens but also the wishes expressed here in this House.

I will just go quickly through my shopping list, in the light of comments I have heard from both sides of the House.

First, with respect to committee chairs, if we want to ensure that committees can operate in as non-partisan a manner as possible, with the maximum consensus, something must be done to eliminate to the greatest extent possible partisan comments within committees.

Obviously, I would first recommend that there be a better distribution of chairs and vice-chairs between the opposition and the government, and that it not be exclusively government members who are assigned as committee chairs.

There are many examples of committees that operate this way, including the National Assembly in Quebec City and the House of Commons in London, and all signs are that this approach is very useful, very productive and very positive.

Ultimately, the current standing orders notwithstanding, the Speaker of the House will have to be able to intervene when a serious problem arises in committee. Unfortunately, when decisions taken in committee run counter to the standing orders, common sense and the very interest of democracy, members need to have a court of last appeal.

In the circumstances, I believe that the Speaker of the House would be ideal for this purpose, because he is elected by all members of the House. He could therefore not be accused of any favouritism. He should therefore be an impartial judge, who could, as need be, produce a final ruling that is both equitable and just.

I think the public expects members of the House of Commons to be able to vote more often according to the interests of their riding and according to their conscience rather than along party lines. Too often, the public has the impression that their members have become more instruments of their political party than representatives of their riding in the House of Commons, in parliament.

Members will have to be allowed more flexibility, so that they can vote freely not only on moral issues, but also on a host of government management issues. To do so, the notion of confidence must be redefined. Every time we vote, the government must not necessarily feel that a vote of confidence is being held.

Apart from budget issues, perhaps we could create a mechanism whereby, if the government were defeated in the House, the very next day, it could put a motion to the House to find out whether it still enjoys its confidence. In such a case, the government would not fall automatically when it is defeated on a particular measure. It would simply be required to ask the House whether it still enjoys its confidence.

We have seen a harmful and unfortunate tendency in recent years, which the government follows increasingly frequently, that of imposing closure and time allocation motions. A mechanism has to be set to require the government to justify and explain its reasons for the measure, which should be exceptional.

The standing orders provide for this. Indeed, Standing Order 78 provides that it must be as a last resort. Just as the standing orders refer to the concept of abuse of parliamentary practice, perhaps we could allow the Speaker to rule whether House practices are being abused.

If the Speaker is considered able to rule on the repetitive, frivolous or vexatious nature of amendments introduced by members, I think it should also be provided that the Speaker may rule on the vexatious nature of the government's excessive use of time allocation and closure motions.

To avoid the very unpleasant and embarrassing situation in which we found ourselves during the last parliament at third reading of the reform of the *Elections Act*, we should allow at least one representative from each recognized political party in this House to speak, at each stage of the review of a bill, or during each debate. We must not find ourselves in the situation where only two of the five political parties in the House are allowed to express their views through their spokespersons.

In my opinion, all the issues brought to the attention of parliamentarians should be votable items. I am referring here to private members' business, to emergency debates and to take note debates. Of course we will have to devise a new process to select the bills that will be reviewed by the House. However, once the House looks at a bill or a motion, particularly a bill or a motion proposed by parliamentarians, it would be more than appropriate for members to vote on them.

We must design a process whereby the House would be asked to formally ratify international treaties signed by the Government of Canada, as is done in most democracies. Canada is an exception to the rule and not necessarily a good one. Under the current system, the government does not have to ask parliament to ratify the treaties it signs. This is an anachronism that should be corrected.

It is also important to change the parliamentary calendar. The government House leader likes to pick and choose when deciding which Westminster rules are important or relevant for the House of Commons in Canada. There are a number of practices in London that do not necessarily suit his needs, so he does not talk about them.

The parliamentary calendar was modified in London some years ago. They took a number of factors into consideration and lightened the calendar. Doing so would

not mean that we would sit any fewer hours; they would just be distributed differently. Friday sittings would not necessarily be abolished, but they would be changed. We could, for example, look at Private Members' Business on Fridays. We could, as they do in London and in Quebec City, have an inquiry mechanism which would require us to go into a specific matter in greater depth with the minister responsible.

It is important to realize that, with the exception of Ontario, all ridings represented by the members of this House are larger than their counterparts in the provincial legislative assemblies. They are, therefore, ridings with far larger populations. The fact is that the members of the House of Commons sit far longer, and far more often, than their counterparts in the various provinces. As a result, we have far less time to cover our far larger ridings and to serve our far greater numbers of constituents.

I think we ought to address this reality, particularly since we need to take increasingly into consideration the expectations of our fellow citizens in this respect, as well as the fact that members of parliament have families. We need to be able to reconcile politics and a family life, particularly if we want to attract more women to politics.

There are grounds for reassessing the parliamentary calendar, reworking things so that all members, or at least most of them, can spend at least one day a week in their riding, not including weekends of course, to do the work of their riding office and look after the needs of their fellow citizens.

Thought needs to be given to making the prescribed form for the presentation of petitions more flexible. This poses a serious problem with our constituents—who are not necessarily up on all the parliamentary jargon—who may spontaneously circulate a petition on a matter of public interest and submit it to their member, only to be told that it is not in the prescribed form and cannot be presented in the House.

This goes against the very principle whereby citizens should be able to submit petitions to the Parliament of Canada. Something must therefore be done to make this prescribed form naturally accessible to citizens.

In order to avoid embarrassing situations such as those we saw prior to 1994 and those we have seen in recent years, the rules must be changed to make opposition motions non-amendable, if I may put it that way.

Something has to be done so that committee work may be televised much more easily, in keeping, naturally, with the guidelines set by the House Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The rules for allowing emergency debates must also be made more flexible. Very often, we have different experiences in the various regions of Canada and Quebec, which we would like to draw to the attention of the

Chair. It may, for a variety of perfectly legitimate reasons, not recognize the importance of issues raised by members. Accordingly, it would be important for us to be able to ease the rules on emergency debates, especially since they do not impinge on regular hours set aside for the business of the House.

Lorne Nystrom (Regina-Qu'Appelle, NDP): I was first elected in 1968. This is my ninth mandate having missed the period from 1993 to 1997. I have seen a lot of differences, and I think many of the differences are negative in terms of the lack of seriousness and respect the present government shows toward parliament.

A friend said to me a few minutes ago in the lobby that the government does not really have respect for the House of Commons. I think there is a lot of truth in that. In 1968, for example, there were a lot of great parliamentarians. I remember John Diefenbaker, Allan MacEachen, Ged Baldwin, Stanley Knowles, Tommy Douglas, David Lewis, Réal Caouette, and people of that sort.

In those days there seemed to be more respect for the House by the government and a lot more real debates would take place. I do not think a serious announcement was made by the government in the late 1960s and early 1970s that was not made on the floor of the House of Commons. The minister would come to the House, he or she would make a statement, and the response would come from the opposition parties.

Gradually that practice changed. I think it changed more radically after the election in 1993. Even in the days of Brian Mulroney and the Tories there seemed to be more give and take in this place. In those days I sat on the finance committee which was chaired by Mr. Blenkarn. It was one of many committees that had a semblance of independence about it, a certain arm's length relationship with the government.

There should be a certain amount of creative tension between the executive and parliament. Parliament should hold the executive to account. We do not have that today. That is one reason our politics have descended into a vortex of great negativity which is getting more and more negative all the time.

It was not any less partisan in those days. If we ever want to see somebody partisan, watch a John Diefenbaker or a Tommy Douglas or an Allan MacEachen. They were really partisan individuals and great parliamentarians. However there was great debate in those days and parliament really meant something. It was the centre of activity in terms of public policy in the country. Much of that is gone now.

We are heading toward a crisis in terms of this institution and the respect that it does not have across the country. Today we are having a debate in the House. As I

speak I hear about 10 to 12 members speaking in the House, and that is normal. Even the members do not take this place very seriously. During the day, of course, committees are meeting at the same time. This place is getting more and more irrelevant in terms of decision-making and in terms of having a real impact. We need to take a serious look at real parliamentary reform.

In addition, we need electoral reform. We must look at the idea of bringing in a measure of proportional representation. We must do something about the Senate. I believe we should abolish it. A lot of people believe we should reform it. In the polls only 5% of the Canadian people support the existing undemocratic, unelected Senate, yet parliamentarians have continued decade after decade to support that institution across the way. We must do some of these things and do them soon.

In the House we start with the idea of confidence votes. We have far too many confidence votes in the House of Commons. We are the most handcuffed parliamentary system in the world. We model ourselves after the British parliament. It is common to have a bill defeated in the British House of Commons.

The Blair Government was exceedingly popular in its first three or four years and is still popular. It has had many bills defeated by its own backbenchers. It was the same in the days of the Thatcher Conservatives. Margaret Thatcher was extremely popular, had great control over the country in terms of her agenda and her vision, and changed that country dramatically. Despite that, there were several occasions when she lost votes in the House of Commons on certain bills. I say so what? All the better. All the more democratic.

I meet government backbenchers every day who are horrendously frustrated. At least in opposition one can get up and make a speech and criticize a policy or advocate a new vision or direction. Government members cannot do that to the extent they should because of the power of the Prime Minister's Office. The PMO and the PCO have the power to appoint cabinet ministers, committee chairs and parliamentary secretaries. They decide different trips, appointments and positions of influence.

That system must end. It must change if parliament is to be more relevant in the future. We need fewer confidence votes. The only confidence votes should be on budget bills, money bills, and things of importance like the throne speech which lays out the vision of the government for the next parliamentary session. Those things must change.

Committees must have more independence. We elect the Speaker of the House of Commons by secret ballot and the whips are not on. We have now had at least two Speakers who were probably not the favourite of the Prime Minister of the day. Members voted freely for the

person they thought could best fill the duties of the Chair.

We cannot even take that principle to committees of the House of Commons and freely and secretly elect the person we think should chair the committee. My God, how timid we are in the House of Commons.

I will give another example. In the finance committee we were studying Bill C-8 the financial institutions Bill—the most voluminous bill in the history of the country. It has 900 pages and affects about 1,400 pages of statutes. One of its recommendations is to set up a new consumer agency. There is supposed to be a commissioner of that consumer agency appointed by the Minister of Finance.

I moved a tiny amendment that said before the appointment of that commissioner of the agency, the name should be referred to the finance committee to have a look at that, not to ratify it, but to have a look at it and express an opinion. Every single government member voted no. Every single opposition member voted yes. We could not even empower ourselves to have a look at the minister's suggestion before the minister appointed that person. What a minuscule almost irrelevant piece of parliamentary reform, and yet we have the stupidity in this place to be so polarized.

The only way it will change is if government backbenchers empower themselves and if we opposition parliamentarians empower ourselves and say no to the government from time to time, like they do in Great Britain and like they do in almost every other democratic country around the world.

There is no reason why parliamentary committees should not have more independence to initiate legislation. There is no reason why a parliamentary secretary has to come to a standing committee as a member of that particular committee and dictate how to vote on each and every single amendment.

Members should ask how long it took the finance committee to consider C-8. It took maybe an hour and a half. It was a futile exercise, because every single amendment that the opposition proposed, the parliamentary secretary, who was the first person recognized, would say no. All the government members voted no. All the opposition voted yes. The only amendments that were accepted were government amendments. Again, only the parliamentary secretary spoke to them. What kind of parliamentary system is this?

We should look at more permanent membership on parliamentary committees. We see this revolving door on these committees, mostly on the government side but not exclusively on that side. We need more permanent membership so people develop some expertise, some independence, some backbone and some gall.

In my last minute I want to talk about the whole question of appointments. I do not think there is any democratic country in the world where the prime minister has so much power. The Prime Minister appoints the head of the national police, the RCMP. He appoints all the justices of the supreme court. He appoints the head of the military. He appoints all the cabinet ministers. He appoints all the senators. He appoints all the heads of the crown corporations. He appoints all the heads of the important boards and agencies. He appoints all the lieutenant governors. In addition to that, he appoints thousands and thousands of people to boards and agencies.

As a result, we often get a lot of people who should not be sitting on those particular boards and agencies. There is no vetting or venting of the process by a parliamentary committee. In many cases a parliamentary committee should have the authority to either ratify or reject the nomination of the Government of Canada. What is so radical about that? At the very least, the Parliament of Canada, through a relevant committee, should review many more of these appointments.

Parliament itself should have more timetables. We should have a timetable to set throne speeches, set budgets and a fixed election date to take that power away from the executive and the Prime Minister of Canada, and put more power back into the hands of the people through their elected representatives, the people elected in all parties in this House.

Bill Casey (Cumberland-Colchester, PC): From my point of view as a member of parliament who has been here on and off since 1988, the first and most important thing that could be changed is the committee system. We have a circus in committees right now. The chairs are predetermined and selected by ministers. Voting is distorted and contorted. It is set up so that only one person can win the chair of a committee. That in itself sets the tone of the committee and makes it far less effective.

Committees would be much more effective if we had secret ballots in the same way as we choose the Speaker. It is just as important to have secret ballots on the agenda.

On the transport committee in the last parliament we went through a series of determinations of important issues to be discussed. We went from 15 issues to 8 to 6 to 2. Just as we were to decide which one we would take up next, the minister announced that he wanted us to do something else. All government members agreed with him and that is what we did. It was not on the list. It was not what we were to do. If the agendas of the committees could be set by secret ballot they would be much more effective and productive.

Parliamentary secretaries are like policemen at committees. They are there to ensure government members

fall in line and do exactly what they are supposed to do. They should not be there. If they are there, they should be there as witnesses.

We should have the power to initiate legislation and the freedom to make amendments much more in line with what is appropriate for the particular issue.

We should have transcripts from committees much faster. It takes weeks and weeks for the public to get a transcript from a committee, at which time the bill could have gone through final reading in the House and have been passed. What is the point of having a transcript so much later? In Britain there is a limit of two weeks for transcripts to get out to the public, and that is the way it should be here. There is no reason it cannot be done.

Access to information is a thorn in my side. I have seen my ability to do my job weakened by changes in the access to information application and government policy. When I apply for access to information I usually get a number of pages, half of which have nothing on them and some of which are all blanked out, with the important parts taken out. It distorts the whole purpose of the access to information system. It could be extremely effective and helpful to us in doing our job. First we are stalled. Then we get abridged versions and distorted versions. In fact, in many cases they are just simply useless.

Another thing that is happening is that as the government divests operations we are losing access to information. A good example is NavCan, the system that controls air traffic control. When it was under Transport Canada we could access information on air traffic controller incident reports, their complaints and concerns. We could access structural reports on air traffic control towers. We can no longer do that because it is divested to NavCan.

Confidence votes are almost the rule and they should not be. We should have free votes on many more issues than we have. Everything is confidence now, even trivial issues. Government members are told to stay in line or they will pay a huge price.

Questions on the order paper take too long to get answered. We could use questions on the order paper much more to our advantage and to the advantage of the Canadian people if there were a shorter time limit. Why does it take more than seven days to answer a question on the order paper? There is no reason. That is something that should be addressed.

Editor's Note: The Report of the Special Committee on Modernization was tabled on June 1, 2001.