



MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



PETER GOLDRING

On June 14, 2012, Member of Parliament Peter Goldring took part in the infamous and hugely wasteful, time-wise, marathon vote called for by the NDP and Green party with Liberal support. During this time, the House of Commons sat for more than 28 continuous hours.

This 28 hour ordeal culminated in a marathon voting session that focused on some 871 proposed amendments to the government's Budget implementation bill had to be dealt with. Imagine the impossibility of having 871 worthwhile amendments to be voted on. While legal to do so, it entails simply the obstruction of Parliament.

House Speaker Andrew Scheer had the amendments grouped for voting purposes, but that still meant Members of Parliament had to rise to vote 156 times in order to deal with the issue. Most MPs re-

mained in the Chamber of the House of Commons rather than miss a vote.

To vote on legislation is one of the privileges and duties of a Member of Parliament and something no-one takes lightly. Our laws are passed after a reasoned debate, with the Official Opposition pointing out what they perceive to be flaws in proposed legislation, and the Government defending its ideas.



A packed House of Commons is pictured, as Member's of Parliament from all political stripes sit through a marathon vote on June 14, 2012.

However, what happened on June 14 was no reasoned debate. There had already been debate on the Bill in the House of Commons and in Committee. This was a procedural tactic introduced by one Opposition member (and supported by others) which had as its purpose to delay as much as possible the passage of the

Bill.



It was a meaningless purpose. With a majority government there seldom is the possibility that a Government introduced Bill would not pass. And, as has been noted, it had already been extensively debated by Members of Parliament. It was already understood the Opposition didn't like the Bill. But shouldn't the Opposition be held accountable in some way for their actions?

From a publicity standpoint perhaps the Opposition got what they wanted. News photos of MPs in their pyjamas preparing for an around the clock session are cute. But before they started their grandstanding did they think to ask what this stunt was costing the taxpayers? Should the Opposition not oppose responsibly? And do they not have a duty to consider the interests of the country as a whole if they want to eventually form the government?

Members of Parliament frequently work long hours, especially when they are in their constituencies and attending community functions. On Parliament Hill the schedule is more routine - the sitting times for the House and Committees are set and other meetings are usually winding up by early evening. When Parliament sits

around the clock, as was required by these spurious amendments, there are extra costs.

Not only do the clerks, pages and security staff in Centre Block put in extra hours, but cafeterias stay open and the buses continue to run between the different buildings on Parliament Hill. With all the

Parliamentary buildings open (because MPs have offices in all of them) extra security staff is needed. To televise the proceedings live to the entire country meant overtime for those involved in producing the show, not to mention for the camera operators and translators. The total cost ran into the millions of dollars, spending caused by an Opposi-

sition that claims to be fiscally responsible.

The Opposition's actions held the House captive for more than 36 hours. Not only were Members of Parliament voting non-stop for almost 24 hours, but in the time leading up to the vote all Members were told that the vote was imminent and not to travel more than 15 minutes away from Parliament Hill so that they could return



Peter Goldring, Member of Parliament for Edmonton East, is pictured delivering an address in the House of Commons.





quickly when the vote was called.

If you've ever watched a Parliamentary vote on television you know how it takes place. The Speaker asks for those in favour of the Bill or Motion to rise, and the MPs do so, a row at a time, sitting when their name is called and they are assured their vote has been registered. The "nays" are recorded in the same fashion. It is somewhat time consuming, but there is an underlying democratic principle of the importance of the MP casting his or her vote to represent their constituents. (By contrast, Ukraine's Parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, uses an electronic system which has led to voting abuses, with some members' "votes" being recorded when they weren't in the chamber.)



The Honourable Andrew Scheer, Speaker of the House of Commons, presided over the 28 hour-long marathon voting.

To stall and delay the vote as much as possible Opposition members came up with a new tactic - slow motion voting (known as "slo-mo-vo"). When the vote was called instead of all those in favour standing row by row as is the custom, the Members rose individually, one at a time. Furthermore, when they rose they rose from their seats very slowly, taking as

much time as possible – five to six times slower than normal - to intentionally slow down the proceedings.

While the frustration of the Opposition can be understood, their issue is perhaps more with the Canadian people who gave the government a majority, ending five years of obstructive tactics that the Opposition had grown used to. The rules of Parliament allow this sort of obstruction, but the rules can be changed to reflect the will of the Canadian people. There is absolutely no need for slow motion voting designed solely to delay proceedings in the House of Commons. This is not democracy in action but rather an abuse of the democratic

process.

It is possible that some good may come of this situation, that Parliament will take the opportunity to re-examine its rules and standing orders to prevent such a marathon session from happening again. At the present there is no rule saying just how long a Member can take to vote. Given recent experience, it stands to reason that there should be. With no rule in place it is

possible the Speaker could refuse to recognize the votes of those who were using "slow motion" tactics, but there is no precedent for such action, and precedent is important in Parliament. It would seem reasonable that an MP who does not stand when the Speaker asks for those in favour (or against) to stand has decided not to vote. Certainly allowances would have to be made for those with a physical impairment, but there is no justifiable reason for slow motion tactics.

In 2010, after serving as an election observer in Ukraine, I had occasion to reflect

on what it means to lose an election. I said one of the marks of a true democracy is the willingness of political leaders to accept the will of the people and move on if they have lost an election. After all, a healthy democracy needs a strong opposition. It has been very apparent to me of the many countries I have visited that this is one lesson that politicians have yet to learn - the role of a good opposition party is as important to democracy as the government. With this stunt in Parliament it is apparent to me that it is a lesson Canada's opposition politicians could also stand to learn.

**UPDATE: On October 19, 2012, Mr. Goldring arrived in Ukraine to be an election monitor for their upcoming parliamentary election. Mr. Goldring, along with other Canadian legislators, will work to ensure that the Ukrainian election is carried out in a free and democratic manner.**

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*This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.*



**Your Opinion Matters...**

**Question #1** Did you watch any of the marathon vote on CPAC?

Yes                       No

**Question #2** Do you think the Parliamentary rules need to be changed to prevent such meaningless marathon voting?

Yes                       No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
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