

JEAN-FRANÇOIS



DÉPUTÉ

Haute-Gaspésie

La Mitis

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Dear colleagues:

I am writing to ask you to look over the motion I have just introduced and which is now on the *Notice Paper*. It addresses a fundamental aspect of our work as MPs, which is having the tools to properly represent our constituents in the House of Commons.

In recent years, a number of us have noticed that the powers of individual MPs have been in steady decline. Even though we were elected to represent the citizens of our respective ridings, power is being increasingly concentrated within the party establishment, within the leader's inner circle. As a result, we have a situation where the inner circle imposes its will by depriving those MPs not in its good graces – or those who do not matter in the short-term political calculations – of the valuable time that should be spent addressing the needs of those who elected us. Whether it be spots on committees or the way oral questions are distributed, everything depends on the party leaders and their inner circles.

There is something wrong when the ability of MPs to do their job properly is entirely dependent on the whims of the party leader and when they can be made to suffer for such minor considerations as whom they supported during a leadership race or as a result of electoral calculations.

Many of you have already spoken out about this alarming situation, and the motion I urge you to support is based on considerations I know many of us have thought about.

There are three parts to the motion I introduced, but ultimately they all have one goal in mind: to wrest from the party establishment the ability to punish MPs and arbitrarily take away their ability to do their jobs.

The first part specifically addresses the House leaders, deputy House leaders, whips, deputy whips and caucus chairs. Under my motion, these senior officials would be recognized by the Speaker only if they are elected by an absolute majority of their caucus in order to avoid situations where they are imposed on MPs without their consent and where they facilitate control of the party by non-elected advisors rather than looking after the rights of each caucus member.

The second part deals with the ability of each MP to ask oral questions and hold the government to account during Question Period. It is time that the questions be left to the MPs rather than the parties so that all MPs can take part in this basic democratic exercise. My motion states that

each opposition MP should be entitled to one question per week, and it would establish a mechanism allowing members to exchange or yield one or more questions to a colleague based on their interests. Simply put, opposition MPs would have control over their own questions and the opportunity to be free of the total control currently exercised by leaders, House leaders and party whips.

Lastly, the third part focuses on MP involvement in committee business. Similarly to oral questions, it is the party leaders, House leaders and whips who are all-powerful and able to impose their will as to who of us sits on – or is removed from – parliamentary committees.

Currently, the order of precedence for Private Members' Business is already by luck of the draw. Those unfortunate enough to be last have no chance of being able to introduce a motion or bill. Under my motion, without touching the proportion of seats for each party, the last MP to be drawn for introducing a bill would be given first choice as to which committee to sit on. Like for oral questions, I am proposing a simple mechanism to ensure that MPs who have relevant background or expertise in a particular field are able to trade places with a colleague.

In anticipation of the 30 new MPs who will arrive following the next election, my motion calls for an extra seat or two on standing committees.

As you can see, I am not proposing anything extraordinary. Quite the contrary, I want to return to the ordinary, to the MP's real role, which is to represent constituents and bring their legitimate requests and aspirations to the House of Commons.

We need to be able to speak freely on behalf of constituents, rather than be gagged by the party establishment. We need to have the tools we need to do our job without being constantly subjected to arbitrary sanctions imposed by the inner circle surrounding the leaders, House leaders, whips and caucus chairs.

Feel free to contact me with any questions, comments and feedback. It would be a real pleasure for me to discuss this fundamental subject with you.



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