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THE SENATE

Motion to Suspend the Honourable Senator Patrick Brazeau,
the Honourable Senator Michael Duffy and the Honourable Senator
Pamela Wallin and Continue to Provide Life, Medical and Dental
Insurance Coverage—Allotment of Time—
Motion Adopted

Speech by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Monday, November 4, 2013

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[Translation]

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MOTION TO SUSPEND THE HONOURABLE SENATOR
PATRICK BRAZEAU, THE HONOURABLE SENATOR
MICHAEL DUFFY AND THE HONOURABLE SENATOR
PAMELA WALLIN AND CONTINUE TO PROVIDE
LIFE, MEDICAL AND DENTAL INSURANCE
COVERAGE—ALLOTMENT OF TIME—
MOTION ADOPTED

Hon. Claudette Tardif: Honourable senators, I rise to speak to the time allocation motion. I will continue to argue that the issue of sanctions for our three colleagues must be dealt with judiciously. This chamber has the responsibility of examining the conduct of its members. When there are abuses, we have a responsibility to take corrective action. However, we must exercise prudence, not only with respect to the measures we take, but also in our approach. Before deciding if we should suspend three of our colleagues, we should proceed with respect for the fundamental principles of justice by identifying a just and fair process. The government is trying with all its might to hastily impose sanctions by bringing in this time allocation motion. However, after several days of debate, the Leader of the Government in the Senate still has not explained why the same approach and the same sanctions apply to all three cases. Not only is the government refusing to consider a process which, in my opinion, would respect the principles of justice and fairness, it is also denying the senators the right to speak by cutting short the debate. We cannot claim to be fulfilling our mandate of sober second thought and objective review if such limits are imposed when senators oppose the will of the government.

Why should we rush to end debate on these three cases? According to the government, this time allocation motion is necessary because the issue of sanctions for our three colleagues is preventing us from proceeding with the work on the Senate's Orders of the Day.

Honourable senators, I find it incredible that the government is telling us, indirectly at least, that we are obstructing the Senate's other work; that the only way to proceed is to end debate, vote and turn the page on this matter; and that by disagreeing we are responsible for delaying our work.

The government determined the Orders of the Day now before us. This situation we have found ourselves in since the opening of the session is the result of the government's own decisions. What is more, the only thing stopping us from moving on to other items on the Orders of the Day is the government's refusal to call them.

Senator Ringuette delivered an excellent speech on her bill to reduce the fees imposed on merchants by credit card companies. As Senator Mercer mentioned the other day, the Speech from the Throne was delivered more than two weeks ago and no one has moved a motion to study it yet. No one on this side of the chamber can do so in the government's place.

• (1600)

If the government seriously wants to resolve this matter fairly and within a reasonable period of time, then the amendment

proposed by Senator Cowan seems to make a lot of sense. To get to the bottom of things and give the sober second thought that is consistent with the constitutional responsibility of this chamber, it seems quite reasonable to me to charge a committee with examining the motion and hearing the senators involved and any other witnesses or experts who might help us in our reflection. We proceed in a similar fashion when we examine bills. Why should we settle for anything less when making a decision on an historic, unprecedented matter in this chamber, which will have major repercussions not only for three of our colleagues, but also for the dignity and reputation of the Senate?

There are still too many questions without answers for us to sweep this under the rug, as the government would like us to do, by suspending the three senators without giving them the chance to be heard during a process that is worthy of our principles of justice and fairness.

[English]

Honourable senators, I stopped counting a long time ago the number of times I've risen in this chamber to speak on time allocation, closure or guillotine motions. It is getting to be a habit with this government, ramming legislation and motions through the Senate as if this chamber were nothing more than a rubber stamp.

This motion is not the only measure invoking closure that the government has pushed through over the past few years. For example, the government has used closure as a procedural hammer to shut down debate on Bill C-10, the omnibus crime bill; Bill C-18, the Wheat Board bill; Bill C-19, the bill abolishing the federal firearms registry; Bill C-27, the bill concerning the financial accountability and transparency of First Nations; and Bill C-31, the immigration reform bill. It is now common practice for the government to push through omnibus budget bills using closure, containing hundreds of clauses amending several acts, which go far beyond what could reasonably be considered fiscal policy.

Today, we see an omnibus sanction motion which lumps together, under Government Business, what was previously dealt with in three separate motions of non-government business. This disturbing pattern does a great disservice to this place.

Today, we see again the leadership of the government in the Senate expecting to see an important and consequential motion passed within the next day. Many senators and many Canadians have real concerns about the government motion before us. Rather than using a procedural manoeuvre to rush it through, this chamber should take the time to establish a fair and reasonable process for the matters before us. Canadians want to have the assurance that there is due process, that the rule of law is being respected, and that there is a presumption of innocence before being proven guilty; and they want to know the facts, all the facts.

Honourable colleagues, while I cannot expect to change the minds of the government leadership on this motion, I do hope that other senators opposite will carefully consider the closure motion that they are being asked to support today. I believe that the government is doing a disservice to the institution we represent by doing things this way. I must oppose this time allocation motion, and I would encourage all honourable senators to do so.