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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, April 3, 2006

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 3, 2006

FIRST SESSION—39TH PARLIAMENT

• (1105)

The 38th Parliament having been dissolved by proclamation on Tuesday, November 29, 2005, and writs having been issued and returned, a new Parliament was summoned to meet for the dispatch of business on Monday, April 3, 2006, and did accordingly meet on that day.

Monday, April 3, 2006

This being the day on which Parliament was convoked by proclamation of Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada for the dispatch of business, and the members of the House being assembled:

Audrey O'Brien, Clerk of the House of Commons, read to the House a letter from the Secretary to the Governor General informing her that the Deputy Governor General would proceed to the Senate chamber today at 11 o'clock to open the first session of the 39th Parliament of Canada.

A message was delivered by the Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Members of the House of Commons:

It is the desire of the Honourable the Deputy to Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada that this honourable House attend her immediately in the chamber of the honourable the Senate.

Accordingly the House went up to the Senate chamber, where the Speaker of the Senate said:

Honourable Members of the Senate, Members of the House of Commons:

I have it in command to let you know that Her Excellency the Governor General of Canada does not see fit to declare the causes of her summoning the present Parliament of Canada until a Speaker of the House of Commons shall have been chosen, according to law, but tomorrow afternoon, Tuesday April 4, at the hour of three o'clock Her Excellency will declare the causes of her calling Parliament.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

And the House being returned to the Commons chamber:

The Clerk of the House: Pursuant to Standing Order 3, I invite Mr. Blaikie, member for the electoral district of Elmwood—Transcona, to take the chair as the member presiding.

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Bill Blaikie): Thank you very much, dear colleagues. Welcome to the 39th Parliament.

[*English*]

I will begin with just a brief history lesson about this particular procedure of electing the Speaker by secret ballot, which was recommended in 1985 by the Special Committee on the Reform of the House of Commons, otherwise known as the McGrath committee. It was recommended at that time as a symbol of the independence of the House from the government and the independence of individual members. As members may know, before that, the Speaker was appointed by the Prime Minister. It is in that spirit that I invite you to participate in this particular exercise today.

The list of members who have withdrawn or who are ineligible as candidates has been placed on each member's desk and is available at the table.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

The list of those members who are eligible as candidates has also been placed on each member's desk and is available at the table. Pursuant to Standing Order 3.1, the House must proceed to the speeches from each candidate for the office of the Speaker.

[*English*]

Notwithstanding any standing order or any usual procedure and practice adopted by this House and to help the newly elected members to identify the candidates for the office of Speaker, I will recognize in alphabetical order each candidate by name and by electoral district.

[*Translation*]

When the last candidate to address the House completes his speech, I will leave the chair for one hour, after which members will proceed to the election of the Speaker.

I will now call upon the hon. Diane Marleau, the honourable member for the electoral district of Sudbury, to address the House for not more than five minutes.

*Election of Speaker**[English]*

Hon. Diane Marleau (Sudbury, Lib.): I say welcome to our hon. colleagues, welcome to this august chamber, the most important place in Canadian democracy. Unfortunately, over the past few years Canadians have become quite disillusioned by the behaviour of some of our colleagues in this august chamber. I would like to say that we owe it to all Canadians to give them an institution they can respect. Therefore, when I was approached by some of our colleagues to allow my name to stand, I agreed. I agreed because I think a positive change would make a tremendous difference in how this House of Commons is run.

[Translation]

My dear colleagues, as you know, I have been a member here in this House for over 17 years. I sat as a member of the opposition for five years. I have served as the minister responsible for various portfolios and I proficiently dealt with all matters before me. I have also served on various committees. Furthermore, I am very familiar with the procedures of this House.

I believe it is absolutely essential that we show respect for one another in this House.

[English]

This is a House of great debate and, yes, great disagreement, but we have all been elected by Canadians and we share a common bond of association in that we want to make this a better country. We want to represent our constituents well. To do that, we must have these great debates, but in the end we must respect each other's positions and work together. I propose to be very strict on the language that is used in the House of Commons because it starts with the language. I would call on all of the parties and all of the leaders to work with me to ensure that Canadians regain the respect this institution deserves.

I thank members for their attention.

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Bill Blaikie): I will now call upon Mr. Peter Milliken, the hon. member for the electoral district of Kingston and the Islands, to address the House for not more than five minutes.

Hon. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Chairman and hon. colleagues, I want to express to each member my congratulations on their re-election or first election to the House.

• (1130)

[Translation]

It is always a pleasure to serve the House as a member of Parliament and I am grateful to the electors of Kingston and the Islands for giving me the mandate to represent them here once again.

[English]

For those who are back, I am delighted to see them back. For those who are new, I express my congratulations, and I hope they enjoy their experience as a member of this place.

As members know, I have been considered by some as a bit of a procedural junkie since my election here in 1988. I have enjoyed working in procedural matters from the beginning, whether it was on the opposition side, the government side or in the chair. I have been a

chair occupant now since 1996, either as Speaker or Deputy Speaker or Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole House.

[Translation]

During that time I always appreciated the cooperation of the hon. members from every party in the House and I wish to be able to continue in the role of Speaker during this Parliament.

There are three important aspects to being the Speaker of the House. Tomorrow the Speaker will deliver a short speech to the Governor General addressing the most important aspect, namely that the Speaker is a servant of the House.

[English]

As such, I believe the Speaker has a role to play in moderating debate and choosing who speaks next and so on, but there is also a great deal of cooperation that Speakers demand from members of the House in making the House function properly. I have always appreciated and enjoyed the opportunity to work with other members, with the whips and House leaders of the various parties and of course with the independent members to ensure that the House functions, not always smoothly, but that it does function.

[Translation]

The Speaker must also represent the House and the hon. members.

Over the years, I have often had the opportunity to explain to Canadians the role and responsibilities of the members of Parliament and make Canadians aware of the importance of the work that the hon. members do here in the House and in their ridings. After all, as I said, the Speaker represents the hon. members and I believe it is very important to continue to explain their role to Canadians.

[English]

I also feel that the Speaker has a role in making very impartial rulings in the House. I have had many occasions when issues have come before the House that required a decision from the Chair, including, of course, a number of ties on votes, which happens from time to time and sometimes involves the Speaker in making a decision. On each occasion I have appreciated the support of hon. members, even when they were on the losing side of the casting vote, because I think the Speaker has to try to make the decision based on procedural practice, which of course I have sought to do on the three occasions that have happened during my term as Speaker.

In every case I have worked with members in promoting the House and its values, in promoting this place as a debating chamber, as a place where we can work together, and where parties are encouraged to work with one another to ensure that the business of the House gets done.

[Translation]

I feel that over the past few years the House has accomplished quite a bit. We have addressed many bills presented in the House and considered every motion introduced here.

[English]

We have had considerable progress despite the fact that we have had minority governments and of course shifting seating arrangements in the House.

I would appreciate the support of hon. members in the voting later today and I appreciate the years of support they have given me in the past.

[*Translation*]

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Bill Blaikie): I will now call upon Mr. Marcel Proulx, the hon. member for the electoral district of Hull—Aylmer to address the House for not more than five minutes.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Presiding Officer. Honourable colleagues, today we will be electing a new Speaker of the House of Commons. I see many new faces this morning, as well as many of my former colleagues: young, old, women, men, newcomers, old-timers, anglophones and franco-phones. I think the characteristic we all share is a desire to do the best and the utmost for our constituents and for all the citizens of our country.

● (1135)

[*English*]

I would like to say a few words about the very important role the Speaker of the House plays. For my new colleagues, I would like to explain that the Speaker does more than allocate floor time. He or she presides over the House equitably and, if I am allowed a parenthesis in the context of a minority government with three opposition parties, the Speaker's judgment, resolve and impartiality in rulings on procedural issues will determine the quality of the working climate in the House.

[*Translation*]

To my former colleagues whom I am happy to see again—and I hasten to congratulate them on their re-election—I want to point out that the mood is not always as calm and generous as we find it this morning.

[*English*]

The climate in the House in recent years, particularly during question period, has had disastrous and unfortunate consequences on our credibility and on the democratic institution to which we belong. Let us not be surprised at the ever-growing indifference and skepticism we provoke. In fact, a recent survey revealed that politicians are trusted by only 14% of Canadians. I do not think that we have any reason to be proud of that score and I am sure we all want to improve ourselves. Let us think about that when we choose who will preside over our deliberations and work.

[*Translation*]

I have been a member of the House of Commons since 1999, and in that time I have had the privilege of working alongside members of all the parties represented in this venerable institution.

[*English*]

During the last Parliament I occupied the Speaker's chair as deputy chair of committees of the whole. The comments I received from members told me I did a good job of protecting their freedom of expression and thereby allowing their constituents to be heard. I am proud of the work we did together.

I also chaired the legislative committee on Bill C-38. Those who were there could judge my impartiality, my immense consideration

Election of Speaker

for our democratic system and the rigour and open-mindedness I brought to the committee's meetings.

We know how demanding our work can be, intellectually, morally and physically. We know how available we have to be for our constituents and for our work in the House, in committees and in subcommittees. However I think the role and duties of members of Parliament within our democratic system must be made better known and their value re-enhanced. I pledge to do this with members if they place their confidence in me.

[*Translation*]

Dear colleagues, Canadians have the profound desire and, dare I say it, the right to have parliamentarians who inspire respect. It would be inappropriate and unrealistic to expect them to respect the institutions if their MPs' attitudes did not demonstrate their pride in and deference to the country's primary institution.

[*English*]

It is up to us to show Canadians that we respect the duty for which they elected us. We must represent their interests, express their convictions and debate on the floor of the House the great issues facing Canadian society. I would add that it is also part of our duty to elect a Speaker who can lead us to the fairest compromises and best decisions for the well-being of our country.

Colleagues, in placing your confidence in me today you will be giving me the privilege of serving the democratic ideology that we all share. You can count on my commitment to directing this 39th Parliament with impartiality, resolve and dignity in both of Canada's official languages.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Bill Blaikie): Before I suspend the sitting for one hour may I bring to the attention of hon. members that the bells to call members back to the House will be sounded for not more than five minutes.

[*Translation*]

The sitting is therefore suspended to the call of the Chair.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:40 a.m.)

● (1240)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12:45 p.m.)

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Bill Blaikie): Order, please. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, the House will now proceed to elect a Speaker. The list of those members who are eligible as candidates has been placed in each polling station and at the table.

● (1245)

[*English*]

I would like the Sergeant-at-Arms to bring to the Chair the ballot box for inspection and to allow the Clerk of the House to inspect and secure the ballot box.

After the Clerk has unsealed the ballots, I will suggest a method of proceeding which will help to accelerate the voting process.

*Election of Speaker**[Translation]*

As we are about to begin the voting procedure, may I remind all members to print the first and last name of their candidate on their ballot paper.

[English]

I would suggest that members leave their desk, exit through the curtains and come to the table using the doors on the left or right side of the Chair on their respective side of the House. A clerk will issue to each member a ballot paper.

[Translation]

After casting their ballot, members are asked to leave the voting area.

[English]

The polling booths are now open to vote.

● (1315)

(Members were issued ballots and marked their ballots in secret at voting stations)

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Bill Blaikie): If there are any hon. members who have not voted and wish to do so, will they please vote now.

All members having voted, I do now instruct the Clerk to proceed with the counting of the ballots after I have cast my ballot.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Bill Blaikie): Before I suspend the sitting may I bring to the attention of hon. members that when the counting of the ballots has been completed the bells to call the members back to the House will be sounded for not more than five minutes.

[Translation]

The sitting is suspended to the call of the Chair.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 1:19 p.m.)

● (1345)

[English]

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 1:48 p.m.)

(The Clerk of the House having provided The Presiding Officer with the name of the member having received a majority of the votes cast)

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Bill Blaikie): Order, please. It is my duty to inform the House that a Speaker of the House has been duly elected.

[Translation]

It is with great pleasure that I do now invite to take the Chair the hon. member for the electoral district of Kingston and the Islands.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[English]

The Presiding Officer (Hon. Bill Blaikie): I would now invite the right hon. Prime Minister and the leader of Her Majesty's loyal opposition to escort the hon. Peter Milliken to the chair.

(The Presiding Officer having vacated the chair, and the mace having been laid under the table, the right hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Leader of the Opposition conducted Mr. Peter Milliken from his seat in the House to the chair)

● (1350)

The Speaker: Hon. members, I beg to return my humble acknowledgments to the House for the great honour you have been pleased to confer upon me by choosing me to be your Speaker.

I must say it is a pleasure to be back in the House after our absence of several months and to have this chance to express my thanks to the electors of Kingston and the Islands for returning me once again to be their member of Parliament.

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to serve in this chamber, as those of us who have been here for a while have discovered, and for those who are newly elected will find out over the next few days. I look forward very much to the sittings of the House for the next while.

As I mentioned this morning, the change in the seating arrangements is one that some of us find a little more dramatic because there has been quite a shift. I recognize the advantages of sitting on either side having done it before, so I appreciate the chance to recognize members from different sides. I hope I do not make too many errors in calling members by former titles or names. There has been a shift and I will try to be correct about that.

I also want to say how much I look forward to the official opening of the House tomorrow and the debates that will follow.

[Translation]

Thank you for electing me as your Speaker. I have spoken with a number of you. I appreciate the support you have given me in the past and the support you have shown for me today. The Speaker cannot do his job without the strong backing of all the members. I hope that you will help me during the session that will open tomorrow.

[English]

I also want to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of three of my sisters, Katherine, Amanda and Elizabeth, and the husbands of Kathy and Elizabeth. My mother is also present with my brother and his wife, Pat. I am delighted they could be here today, as they have been in the past.

I look forward very much to our opportunities to meet over the next few days.

[Translation]

I hope that we will have many opportunities to meet at receptions and other events that will follow the opening of Parliament. The work that the members do is extremely important to the House, the Speaker and everyone and such events afford us important opportunities to get together.

Election of Speaker

[English]

I hope the new members will get to meet some of the more experienced ones over the course of the next week or two. In the experience we have had here, it is a great group of men of women that Canadians have chosen to represent them in the House.

I look forward very much to working with all of you to make our country a better place to live. Thank you very much.

And the mace having been laid upon the table:

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I begin by saying I really will mind if you call me by my former title.

• (1355)

[Translation]

First, on behalf of the government, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands on being re-elected as Speaker of the House. It is a well-deserved honour.

[English]

I will say a few words, Mr. Speaker. First, I appreciate your resistance being thrown to the chair today, much more than the last time I did it. However, I will say that I noticed the members were not so reluctant this time. Your re-election is indicative of the trust that all members of the House, all parties in the House, have in your abilities as Speaker.

Some members will know, and I know, Mr. Speaker, that you will know, that we have known each other a very long time. We first became marginally acquainted when you were a young member of Parliament and I was a legislative assistant. We had dinner a couple of times when I was a young member of Parliament. I have always had, as many members of the House have, a great appreciation for your abilities and a great understanding of your aspirations for the country. We only ever had one difficulty, and that was your partisanship. By virtue of your achievement today, you have largely resolved that problem for me.

Over the years, Mr. Speaker, you have demonstrated a commitment to fair, orderly proceedings in this House. You did an exceptional job of navigating what were very choppy waters in the last Parliament. We all have a great confidence that you will do an equally good job in the 39th Parliament.

In closing, once again, I know I speak for all members of the government's side when I congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your re-election.

[Translation]

On behalf of the government and all Canadians, thank you for your dedication to the Parliament of Canada.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I echo the Prime Minister's remarks. I share his feeling and hope that there will be no confusion regarding our roles.

Mr. Speaker, I assure you that you have the opposition's full cooperation.

[English]

We wish you well in your role, Mr. Speaker, as the guardian of the dignity and of the privileges of this House.

We congratulate Madame Marleau and Monsieur Proulx for having stood to be Speaker. We recognize that in their interventions they have pointed out that our comportment in the House is to some extent translated into the respect which our fellow citizens regard us and the work which we do.

For that reason, Sir, I can assure you that you will have our entire confidence and our support in ensuring that we have orderly, dignified and responsible behaviour in the House.

I follow what the Prime Minister said in his remarks.

[Translation]

He noted that you had had experience both in opposition and in government.

Mr. Speaker, having spent some time on the other side of the House, we have always felt that you were a little too strict with the government and not strict enough with the opposition. We are counting on your maintaining this tradition in the House.

[English]

We wish you well in your present functions, Mr. Speaker.

• (1400)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Ducesse (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc and of all my colleagues, I am pleased to offer you my warmest congratulations on your election.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all candidates who expressed an interest in taking on this function so vital to the operation of the House of Commons. Your duties and responsibilities will be especially evident in this context of a minority government, but you already have some experience in this area.

The elected representatives in the House of Commons are the incarnation of the will of the people and, in the final analysis, it is this democratic assembly that must have the final say, that must make the legislative and financial decisions. We know the importance of your role, which is to defend the rights of MPs. It is, however, also to guard the rights of Parliament and the rights of all parliamentary democracies so that we may hold debates, which, while controversial and impassioned at times, are still essential to vibrant democracy in both Canada and Quebec.

I can assure you of the cooperation of the Bloc Québécois as you carry out your duties. In closing, I would like to wish us all a successful session.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate you on behalf of the New Democratic caucus, which has more members this time around.

I hope you will give me the opportunity to say a few words.

*Election of Speaker**[English]*

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like, I am sure on behalf of all of the House, to thank the dean of the House, the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, for the excellent way in which he conducted the procedures we witnessed here today. I also want to add my voice of thanks, and that of our party, to the member for Sudbury and the member for Hull—Aylmer for presenting their names and creating our first democratic moment here in the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to your success in becoming the Speaker of the House again, this in many ways is due not only to your deep respect for the institution, your understanding of your role as a servant of the House about which you spoke very eloquently, of decisions that you have made in the past, but also a deep sense that we all have of you, that you are a person of integrity, that you are a person who is able to deal with each and every one of us as equals in a friendly and straightforward fashion. We appreciate that very much.

[Translation]

I would like to say a few words to my fellow members who are here, because we have the responsibility to maintain certain ethics in the House.

[English]

I am sure that you heard from Canadians from coast to coast to coast in the last months about their disappointment in the way in which discussion was taking place in this House. I recall some of the words that Ed Broadbent said in his last major speech here. He called on all of us to recognize the inherent dignity of each and every person in the House and to recognize that Canadians by the thousands had selected each one of us to be here to represent them and to raise their concerns in the House.

I hope very much that all of the members here will, and I certainly will make this commitment on my own behalf and on behalf of my party, and I look to the other leaders to work with us on this, in order that we can do much better to present to Canadians a democratic process of debate of which we can all be proud.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I realize that you need our help as you cannot do it all on your own. Thus, we will work respectfully with you at all times.

Congratulations and good luck.

● (1405)

The Speaker: I would like to thank all the honourable members and leaders in the House for their kind words. I appreciate everything that was said.

[English]

I also would like to express my thanks to the other two candidates who ran in the election for Speaker, my colleagues the hon. member for Sudbury and the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer.

[Translation]

It was a pleasure to have such candidates for the election.

[English]

I should also advise the House that I would like to have a reception for hon. members and particularly for the other candidates at 4:00 today in room 216. I would be happy to invite all hon. members to raise a glass to mark the beginning of the session this afternoon.

* * *

*[Translation]***OPENING OF PARLIAMENT**

The Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that I have received the following message:

Rideau Hall

April 3, 2006

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, and His Excellency Jean-Daniel Lafond will arrive at the Peace Tower at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 4, 2006. When it has been confirmed that all is in readiness, Their Excellencies shall proceed to the chamber of the Senate to formally open the first session of the 39th Parliament of Canada.

Yours sincerely,

Barbara Uteck

Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 3 p.m., at which time the House will proceed to the Senate where Her Excellency will open the first session of the 39th Parliament.

(The House adjourned at 2:07 p.m.)

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