

THE HONOURABLE JOE VOLPE, P.C., M.P.
SPEECH ON LIBERAL OPPOSITION DAY MOTION
JUNE 5, 2008

Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to engage in this debate but for different reasons than the ones that have been enumerated so far. They have all been very eloquent and to the point.

I want to associate myself not only to the motion but to my Honourable colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River who had the temerity and wisdom to put his motion forward before the House. I think it is called trying to solve a problem and he should be commended for that.

The problem, as I see it, and not as everybody else has necessarily seen it, is that this is not essentially what we are here to do. This is a correction of the mechanisms that we utilize to do what we are supposed to do. In other words, he is suggesting that we are being deprived of the tools that make us capable of fulfilling our duties.

I am surprised that government members are actually objecting to this motion, that other members of Parliament in the House would actually propose a solution to an impediment that would allow members of Parliament to work and do their jobs properly.

Some may wonder where I am going with this. Like all of those who are watching this sitting, they are saying they really do not understand what it is that the Members of Parliament are complaining about. I will give an example of what this really means.

If a Member of Parliament is in any way constrained to speak his or her mind on a matter of great importance to the general public because there is a dilatory action, like a lawsuit threatened or real, then we might as well shut this place down. For example, just this morning I picked up a newspaper and there I read, much to my surprise, that the Minister of Finance was going to come to the aid of General Motors. He was going to use a \$250 million fund in order to accomplish that objective.

We can go to the heart of the matter for a moment, but just imagine that I said that this person is making promises he cannot keep. The Minister of Finance is leading people down the garden path, his government is deliberately distorting what it can or will do for the auto sector, and in particular the employees in Oshawa, because there is no such fund. He has no right to make such a promise. There is no such fund. Yes, there is an allusion to it in Bill C-50, but Bill C-50 has not passed the House yet.

Mr. Speaker, I know you are always a dutiful listener. The members on the other side probably are not, so if they had been a little bit more patient, which is a virtue that they cannot exhibit, at least not publicly, although I acknowledge that he has indicated he was incorrect in what he had heard already.

I was going to say that if I accused the Minister of Finance of deliberately abusing the position that he had in order to satisfy his own electoral, and therefore personal and financial, needs in Oshawa in a way that he did not do anywhere else, all I would have to do is wait to receive a legal notice so that I could not vote on this in committee, that I could not express myself because I would be in some way disadvantaging someone, or in fact advantaging myself.

The member for Scarborough—Rouge River, with this motion, is saying he wants members of all caucuses to be able to go to committee and to raise the questions that they need to raise in the fulfillment of public policy. For example, in this instance, since Bill C-50 has not passed, since there is not a regulatory process for inviting applications for funding, and since the due diligence has not yet been put in place for the funding of any application, why would someone deliberately mislead a significant segment of the auto industry or the manufacturing sector in order to realize their own personal gain?

That is a logic that the Conservatives would think was acceptable when they are trying to shut down my colleague from West Nova. We have to exercise a little bit of caution here. We need to be able to tell the world that in Canada Members of Parliament are going to be unconstrained as they seek solutions to problems.

For example, I would have wanted to ask the Minister of Finance where he got some of the information that he was going to be able to sprinkle some money on General Motors in order to put on a third line for a product that nobody knows exists and that nobody knows is under development. How did he get that information? Who gave it to him? Did he go to General Motors and say that the \$200 million it received for the Beacon project entitles us to ask what is being done in the community, for the people who not only work at General Motors but the community that depends on its functioning for its livelihood.

Where is it going with the money that we gave it to stimulate research and development, to train people for a new technology, to bring in new technologies so that we could ensure the health and continuity of this part of this sector or the manufacturing environment?

Conservatives could easily come forward and say that here again I am attributing motive and therefore not being fair, and suggesting, for example, that his silence when the auto sector was complaining about problems associated with engine plants in Windsor, Chatham, St. Catharines and Brampton, that all of these had nothing to do with personal interests.

Suddenly, the Minister of Finance is faced with the problem in a riding adjacent to his own and immediately talks about parliamentary process that has not yet seen its course, but he is prepared to put up whatever amounts of money in order to protect his own interest.

Would that be a fair comment by any member? Clearly not, but they are legitimate questions to ask in a parliamentary environment. Certainly, they would not merit an attack on legal grounds, which I think is what my colleague from Scarborough—Rouge River is saying. Let members debate the issues that are important to people.

Is the substance of this debate of great and central importance to all of those people in Oshawa and in the manufacturing sector in Ontario? What they want to know is that the argument, whatever is in the essence of this motion, goes to the heart of Members of Parliament being able to resolve the problems that they face on a day-to-day basis for themselves and their families.

I would have asked why, for example, we would be looking at some of these statements that are gratuitously thrown out in the press as an opportunity to gain some accolades and perhaps some support from an electoral point of view if this motion did not go through, if the government insists on beating down a motion that addresses the fundamental rights of Members of Parliament to promote the interests of Canadians everywhere, we could, collectively, bring similar kinds of motions forward with respect to a finance minister who is being so irresponsible as to gratuitously throw out the public's money before it has been authorized for distribution.

That is a lot more serious accusation than the one against the member for West Nova, who has been forceful in getting to the heart of matters that are important to Canadians everywhere, that go to the issue of accountability and responsibility in government, which the government said were important.

The Conservatives said that accountability, responsibility, openness, and transparency were the things that counted in government but suddenly they are part of a big libel chill in order to silence the voice of Members of Parliament everywhere.

For example, somebody like me could not ask the Minister of Finance if he has engaged in conversations with his Ontario counterpart on the auto sector or the manufacturing sector. I could not ask if he spoke to his colleague, the human resources minister, about job transitions for those individuals who will be facing unemployment today at that plant and elsewhere in southern Ontario. I could not ask him if he talked to his colleague, the Minister of Industry, to see whether he would support that kind of initiative and whether he managed to get it passed in cabinet so the general public could employ all of its resources to achieve such an end. That is what the motion really means.

Canadians want to know that Members of Parliament can ask those kinds of questions without the libel chill that the government wants to put as a veil over transparency and accountability. The Conservatives want nothing to do with that. We want to open it up.