

Chong's plan gathering support

Wellington-Halton Hills Conservative MP Michael Chong believes that his fellow members of the House of Commons are ready to get behind his efforts to present a better face of politics to Canadians.

Chong, who's put together a six-point plan to improve civility during the daily Question Period in the Commons, said recently that his procedural motion could start making its way through Parliament within weeks.

And in as little as six months, with support from other parties, Canadians could see a markedly different style of Question Period—one in which antics are discouraged and answers are demanded.

Calling his plan a "viable and reasonable" suggestion to make Question Period less of a partisan spectacle, Chong told a parliamentary reform conference last week that he hopes it will pass.

Jay Hill, who up until recently was the Government House Leader for the Conservatives, also appeared to be throwing his endorsement behind Chong's bid to improve Question Period.

"The motion he's brought forward is an ambitious one," said Hill, who is retiring from politics after 17 years and who has been replaced by John Baird as House leader. "If Mr. Chong is successful and his motion passes ... it will be one of the largest overhauls (of) Question Period in our nation's history."

Partisan sparring in the Commons has always been high and intemperate explo-

sions aren't unusual, even from prime ministers.

Hill said that sometimes the yelling and insults are so loud between the parties that the "barroom" solution seems the only sensible one—"punching out" the rival across the aisle.

"In my experience, being a 'redneck' from northeastern British Columbia, that would probably be the outcome if in any other place of work if you were subject to the insults that you are daily in the House of Commons during Question Period," Hill said.

About 20 MPs from all parties have backed Chong's motion, which should come to a vote soon. If it passes—and chances are believed to be good it will—then it will be further studied by a Commons committee and could be put in place by early 2011.

The six specific proposals in Chong's bill to reform Question Period:

- Elevate decorum and fortify the use of discipline by the Speaker;
- Lengthen the amount of time given for each question and answer;
- Require that ministers respond to questions directed at them;
- Allocate half the questions each day for backbench members;
- Dedicate Wednesday exclusively for questions to the prime minister;
- Dedicate the rest of the week to questions for ministers other than the PM.

—Torstar News Service



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