

Auditor General Act

o'clock. For that reason we thought it would make more sense to call it five o'clock and then, at five o'clock, proceed with Private Members' Hour. The second speaker in the debate, which will be called at eleven o'clock tomorrow, will be the spokesperson for the Official Opposition. I think it would be more appropriate to handle it that way. In that way no one will be inconvenienced.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to call it five o'clock?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS--BILLS

[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert) moved that Bill C-288, an Act to amend the Auditor General Act, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is the third time I have put this Bill or legislation very similar to it before the House. Under ordinary circumstances I may have given up by now and said that it was not worth the effort. However, when I presented this Bill in the House last April, it was seconded by the Hon. Member for Trinity (Miss Nicholson) and the Hon. Member for York East (Mr. Redway) who are the chairman and vice-chairman respectively of the Public Accounts Committee. I therefore decided that in order to keep this before Parliament and keep it alive it was worth while to present it once more.

This legislation has a long history. On July 18, 1980, the Public Accounts Committee presented a report to the House which suggested that the Auditor General use his power more often to make special reports to the committee so that the committee would be able to examine current issues more often. As a result of the procedure of the Auditor General in reporting only once a year, we often found ourselves dealing on the Public Accounts Committee with subjects which were two and sometimes even three years old, and quite often with audit reports which were more than a year old. We were always after the fact and very rarely dealing with current situations.

In 1981 there was an agreement among all Parties of this House. The then President of the Treasury Board, House Leader of the Official Opposition, and Leader of the New Democratic caucus agreed to allow legislation to come before this House which would do exactly what I am suggesting in this Bill today, that is, allow the Auditor General to report intermittently rather than only once a year. This legislation

was submitted to the Government early in 1982 but did not proceed at that time and, consequently, was not passed. Since then I have submitted this Bill in 1985, 1987, and again this year. In each case it was either talked out or did not receive the consent of the House.

The Bill's purpose is very simple and straightforward. It would allow the Auditor General to report intermittently rather than under the present structure of once a year. All that is required is a very small change in the Act. The words "the Auditor General shall report at least annually to the House of Commons" are added as well as some subsequent changes which are required in order that the rest of the Bill will make sense, as is quite often the case in an amending Bill.

This small change in the Auditor General's Act has been recommended by the Public Accounts Committee, as I have indicated, on three separate occasions. It has been recommended by the Auditor General's office and also by a private sector committee which has been advising on accountability in government. In addition, it has been recommended by a cross-section of Members of the House from all three Parties. It would seem, therefore, that we should proceed with it but we have not done so.

In each case that this legislation has been presented to the House it has been talked out and consequently dropped from the Order Paper. This may be my last opportunity to bring the Bill before the House for passage into the committee which can decide whether to let the Bill proceed or be amended to address any government concerns. However, I know that many government Members agree with the Bill in its present form.

• (1640)

It has been suggested that the Government would not be opposed to quarterly reports. Such a policy would not even require a change in the Act and could take place with the changes I have suggested.

The committee could also decide that the Bill is unacceptable in its present form and recommend that it be withdrawn. I would be quite willing to do that.

I would also accept a government Bill instead and would withdraw mine on that occasion. That may be the best way to deal with it. Any of these suggestions are possibilities we should consider.

Why should the changes be made? One of the concerns of the Public Accounts Committee, and other Members of Parliament, is that it cannot deal with current issues. When the Auditor General makes his report in the fall, the Public Accounts Committee must suddenly deal with five or six Departments whose comprehensive audits have been reported in the annual report. As well, a number of audit notes have to be studied along with other areas of concern. We must decide which of these items we will discuss for the rest of the year until the next Auditor General's report is tabled. If this tabling could be made intermittently, we would be dealing with many