

Government Orders

This will help to ensure that the departments establish meaningful and challenging targets.

In June the government released a guide to green government, which was endorsed by the Prime Minister and all ministers. The guide will assist federal departments and their stakeholders in the preparation of their sustainable development strategies.

Federal government departments differ in their mandates and in their abilities to influence Canada's sustainable development prospects. As a result, their strategies will differ, but clearly together they must present a coherent and consistent government approach to sustainable development.

Sustainable development is an evolving concept. Indeed, our understanding of sustainable development has evolved considerably in the past few years and it will continue to evolve as we grasp a further understanding of what it means as we move to operationalize it.

The guide I mentioned provides core concepts and principles underlying sustainable development as a starting point. The concepts and principles will likely continue to evolve over time and perhaps new concepts and principles will emerge.

Bill C-83 requires departments to update their sustainable development strategies and requires responsible ministers to table the updates in the House every three years. This allows the evolving nature of sustainable development and the lessons learned from operationalizing it to continually be incorporated into the strategies.

Another key aspect of Bill C-83 is the appointment of a commissioner of the environment and sustainable development within the office of the auditor general. The commissioner will assist the auditor general in performing general auditing duties. He or she will also report annually to the House on any matter concerning sustainable development that he or she considers merits the attention of the House. The commissioner will not only strengthen the work of the office of the auditor general on the environment and sustainable development, he or she will also enhance the federal government's accountability for its actions or its inaction on the environment and sustainable development.

We are the first major country to build sustainable development into our economy in this way. It is becoming increasingly clear that those economies that take environmental costs into account are in fact the most efficient of modern economies.

Bill C-83 establishes a framework for sustainability across all federal departments and enhances the government's accountability to the House for its progress on sustainable development. We are not afraid of being held accountable in this way because we are building a record of accomplishments, a record of which we are proud.

Bill C-83 will have far reaching implications within the government and within our society as a whole. It will move Canada forward along the path from talking about sustainability to acting sustainably. I look forward to the speedy passage of this important legislation.

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-83.

The Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development took on the task of examining the government's commitment to establish an environmental equivalent of the auditor general. This was in fact a key red book commitment. It is an idea that has been discussed and debated for many years. It is also an idea the government is making a reality in short order.

• (1630)

The committee heard from many stakeholders representing a wide range of interests and opinions. Their testimony provided important insights into what must be done for Canada to achieve sustainable development.

The committee in preparing its report and the government in proposing Bill C-83 have paid careful attention to the message of stakeholders. The committee submitted its report in May of last year and the government responded just over a year ago. Its response was aimed at integrating economic, environmental and social factors in federal planning and decision making across all departments, just what the stakeholders had asked for.

Key aspects of that response include the amendments to the Auditor General Act with which we are involved today. The amendments would provide openness, transparency and leadership by government on sustainable development and continued action to make sustainable development a real practice throughout the federal government. Bill C-83 is central to integrating the environmental and sustainable development in government planning decisions across all federal government departments.

Last year I had the pleasure of being part of the Special Joint Committee for the Review of Canada's Foreign Policy. For the first time as part of a review of foreign policy one of the areas we looked at was sustainable development and the environment. We can see more and more these days how much environmental issues are international matters.

The hon. member for Peace River is here today. He was also a part of that review. It was a very interesting process. I was pleased that for the first time as a committee we recognized in our report that the federal government should include as a major plank of its foreign policy the promotion of sustainable development around the world.