

Private Members' Business

I ask members opposite who are going to speak on this bill to give serious consideration to speaking very briefly, allowing the debate to terminate before six o'clock and allowing this motion to go before a committee for study.

Mr. J.W. Bud Bird (Fredericton—York—Sunbury): Mr. Speaker, although I am not a member opposite in a geographic sense, I would have to say that I probably will be deemed to be a member opposite when I am finished speaking to this motion.

First of all, I congratulate the hon. member for putting her motion. I have the privilege to serve with her on the environment committee of the House of Commons where she makes a major contribution. Generally speaking, we and other members of that committee are in consensus not only about the importance of the environment to Canada and to the world, but also about the measures that we must take to enhance and protect our environment in this country.

I would have to say that, in reading the hon. member's motion to appoint an environmental auditor general, I believe as well intentioned as her resolution may be, in my view it goes in the wrong direction to the ultimate resolution of sustainable development in the sense that sustainable development means the reconciliation of both economic and environmental factors.

To isolate an auditor general strictly in an environmental sense is to miss the point that we cannot ignore the environmental without considering the economic and vice versa. In fact, I would refer the hon. member to a resolution in which she shared in our interim report on global warming, which was published just before the Geneva convention when, in recommendation 16, the environment committee said that we recommended the auditor general—

Mrs. Catterall: I said that.

Mr. Bird: Did you? I missed that.

Perhaps it is worth reading again, because frankly it underlines the weakness in the concept of an environmental auditor general.

It does recommend an auditor general who works in conjunction with both the departments of environment and finance to establish an environmental audit function. I do not think there can be any dispute about the need and the concept for an audit of environmental considerations, as is the case for an audit of economic considerations.

Again, I say that in the concept of sustainable development, the two very much go together.

I would also like to say that one of the areas that has been of concern to the environment committee and to another committee on which I sit, the forestry and fisheries committee, is the organization of environment departments themselves whether they are operating departments, regulatory departments or policy departments.

I think a general consensus has developed and is recommended in this report by the environment committee and also by the forestry subcommittee, that environment departments generally be policy and regulatory departments whose disciplines and policies permeate the operating decisions and criteria of all government departments wherever they may fall, be they provincial environment departments and other provincial departments, or federal government departments and the federal environment department.

The concept of environmental administration should be approached in very much the same manner that economic and financial considerations are approached in a policy and regulatory sense, and not in an operating sense.

I would like to refer to the forestry report in brief, if I may, because this report which addresses the federal role in the forests of Canada is very much an environmental document. It touches on the commercial importance of forestry, but it also underlines the fact that the forests are the essence of the environment of this country. It expresses concerns, as I have said, that environmental policies and disciplines should permeate every operating entity and every operating decision, just as do financial and economic considerations. But it also underlines the fact that operating agencies should conduct the operations.

There is an area of concern that I would like to mention in respect of the initiatives we are taking to enhance our environmental disciplines in Canada, specifically with respect to Bill C-78, which is itself a move in a direction of more intensive environmental audit. I have expressed a concern publicly in the environment committee, and I would like to express the concern again here today that the Department of the Environment, in its environmental assessment review process, does not become a master operator, a font of wisdom in all directions and in all disciplines.