

so well, why would he not manage in the public interest as well as in the private interest?

Now we see Air Canada, just a little over a year later, losing business. We see competitiveness in our air industry damaged beyond belief. We see reduced service, and we see increased costs.

We see the post office under this government's view of how Crown corporations should act, delivering a lesser and lesser level of service to fewer and fewer Canadians and abandoning all pretence at what this country is about, which is equality of service and equality of standards to Canadians across Canada.

I hesitate to accept that the changes being made in this bill as to how Crown corporations are going to report and how they are going to be held accountable will improve the functioning of Crown corporations. They will do nothing more than prepare them a little better for privatization and sell-off.

What has the public got out of the sell-off of Crown corporations? The selling of a Crown corporation and not using the proceeds to reduce the national debt is a little like selling your house to pay your heating bill. If you are selling off an asset, you should use it to reduce your capital obligations, and this government has not done that.

It has sold off billions of dollars of Crown corporations over the last six years. Has any of that money been used directly to write down the debt and to reduce the growing burden of interest payments on the taxpayers of Canada? I do not think so. If we look at the debt now compared to what it was when the government came to office in 1984, we see that it is more than double.

I would think that in making changes to help Crown corporations operate and in trying to make them more accountable this government should also be reaffirming its commitment to the idea of the public sector—public policy role of Crown corporations and their obligation to serve a public policy purpose as opposed simply to making profits.

If for instance we were amending the accountability processes for Crown corporations, this would have been an opportune time to include environmental auditing and the other various audits and mechanisms with which the bill deals, but it does not do that. It further reduces

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the obligation of the President of the Treasury Board to report to this House on how Crown corporations are exercising their accountability. It reduces that obligation from four times a year to once a year.

I think that is enough on Crown corporations. I would like to move on to some of the other financial management measures in this bill. One of the difficulties is that the public does not have a very good record of financial management by this government on which to judge this bill.

We are slightly suspicious of intentions to expand the use of collection agencies, especially as we see the government forcing more and more of the burden of taxation on to lower income Canadians. That will only be exacerbated when the GST is imposed. We see increasing discretion by ministers in this bill for forgiveness of debts to the government. Yet we see the ability to use collection agencies to go out and grab from Canadians the few dollars that they may not be able to pay.

I see very little in this bill that controls the use of collection agencies by this government. I would like to touch on one area where we have reason to be concerned about the failure of the government to explain adequately to Canadians how it is spending their money and how it is being accountable and responsible for their money.

I was shocked to be sitting at a meeting of Standing Committee on Public Accounts less than six months ago when a member of the committee asked if Treasury Board officials could tell us whether we are really saving money by downsizing the Public Service, for instance. They were asked if they could tell us how the cost of contracting out services, hiring contract people, hiring temporary agencies to perform work previously done by Public Service employees was saving us money, or how it compared to the cost of doing it with permanent, long-term committed Public Service employees. The shocking answer was that Treasury Board could not tell the public accounts committee that because it did not keep track of it. It is no wonder that Canadians have lost confidence in the financial management practices of the government.

I would like to refer to some of the cuts that were announced by the government last Friday which give us deep cause for concern. It was almost the atmosphere in which this was done. We saw the travesty of the Prime