

Parliament

legislation that fall, and we discussed the beginning of this study. From that day right up to today, we worked closely with Mr. Tim Reid, a deputy secretary and assistant secretary of the Treasury Board who is responsible for this and who is in the audience. We have worked closely with them in every possible way.

We subscribe—and so does the Treasury Board secretariat—to the comment made in the Wilson committee report and that is that the Treasury Board and we are natural allies. I am not referring as much there, although it is true, to the ministers as I am talking about the secretariat, and now, of course, to the office of the Comptroller General. We have a cordial although not cosy relationship in trying to get better financial administration. So we have received excellent co-operation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is important to note that the Auditor General of Canada said so many times. I would also like, Mr. Speaker, to read a few quotes—

[English]

I would also like to take a brief moment to mention the Auditor General's remarks concerning a possible improvement in the financial information that parliament receives. I refer specifically to chapter 6 of his 1978 report, and in particular paragraphs 6.29 and 6.30 at page 111, which I think point out a fundamental and complicated problem which parliamentarians will have to study once and for all and make up their minds as to priorities. At paragraph 6.29 the Auditor General says:

One or several volumes? Changes have progressively increased the size of the blue book as the Treasury Board has added to the information previously provided.

I emphasize the words "added to the information".

Paragraph 6.29 continues:

The 1978-79 estimates has 1,271 pages. If implemented, the suggestions we are advancing will further increase the document's size.

Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker? Paragraph 6.30 states:

This illustrates a basic dilemma confronting modern governments. The size and variety of their activities require presentation in a generalized, summary manner if the information is to be contained in a single volume. Such summary data, however, limit meaningful analysis. The processes, operations and projects being performed must be disclosed, costed and related to the results expected before the data become precise enough to be useful. As a result, there may be a need for the estimates to be split into two components: a volume on government-wide spending, concentrating on the proposed global amounts and a second volume or volumes on departments and agencies, showing how they plan to manage the funds.

● (1742)

I am sure the public accounts committee will be studying this particular chapter in great detail along with many others.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that today members do not lack information but rather the time to examine the information made available to them and the reports delivered to their offices on a daily basis by all departments, agencies and, of course, other media. I am not convinced that one or two additional books or a volume going from 1,271 pages to 2,000 pages are necessarily going to help members. It is rather the decisions that each and every one of us will make to limit himself to one or two subjects and being well prepared in specific areas that are important. I also think that the public accounts committee will deal seriously, as it always does, with

the last report tabled by the Auditor General, and we hear very different opinions I believe from the people around that table and we are going in all likelihood to spend weeks and weeks considering that last report.

I would like to conclude, Mr. Speaker, by quoting the last paragraph of the letter of the Auditor General of Canada contained in his latest report. It is addressed to the former president of Treasury Board, and I believe that too is very important. It reads:

Following the established practice of the past several years and in response to the stated request of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, I shall continue to follow closely the various aspects of the programs to implement recommended changes which have been agreed on and will be reporting on their progress in future reports to the House of Commons. In this connection, your letter of October 13 setting out the government's position and plans with regard to the more significant recommendations will be particularly helpful. I appreciate very much your precedent-setting action in making it available to me for inclusion in the Centennial Annual Report of the Auditor General to the House of Commons.

[English]

I could go on and read into the record almost every page of the Auditor General's report. However, I conclude now by saying there is no doubt that enough evidence has been put forward today and at other times during the session to show that this government realizes it has a very responsible duty to the taxpayers of Canada. Each one of us should take his responsibility as well.

A lot of the criticism levelled at the government has been from sources that are ill informed. I doubt whether a member of this House, no matter whether he has been here 15 or 54 years, could make a very objective criticism of Treasury Board or the administration of the government accounts without taking a very serious attitude. I suggest that if a member does not have the time to become a full member of the public accounts committee, he should at least take some interest in that committee. I have had a lot of experience with it. There is no other committee that provides the training and experience of that committee.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, just a few minutes ago I heard the hon. member for Pontiac (Mr. Lefebvre), say that there is nothing wrong with the government or Treasury Board with respect to the administration of Canada's expenditures.

Mr. Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. That is not true and the hon. member knows it. This debate so far has been on a high level. With the hon. member's intervention, that will now change.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): I am concerned about what the Auditor General said. He made very clear the lack of expertise as to the government's control over departments and senior management levels and the results that flow therefrom. That is very clear, and it is the whole purpose of having the Auditor General.

The Auditor General should be commended not only for this year's report but for last year's report, which dealt in a new