

*Private Members' Business*

establish specific limits and restrictions. For example the House permits members to send annually no more than four newsletters, called householders. Although this no doubt curbs wasteful use or misuse, it restricts the member to some extent. For example the member who thinks that bi-monthly householders are a more effective way to communicate than frequent trips to the constituency, cannot make that choice”.

• (1540)

Let us go back to the first reason as laid out by the Auditor General. We know that the Public Accounts of Canada list the expenses of each member of Parliament. These expenses are broken down into three categories by indemnities, by expense allowances and by travel expenses. Those are the three large categories of expenditures.

The Auditor General examined the House of Commons administration in 1991. I first of all would like to state that he clearly concluded that all provisions approved by the Board of Internal Economy were complied with in all but a few minor cases. He stated the transactions were accurately and completely recorded.

To return to the categories of expenditures displayed in the public accounts, the Auditor General stated that three categories of expenditures did not capture all expenditures of MPs. This is because the House of Commons budget provides services to each member which are not included in these three categories. In fact, the Auditor General stated that the public accounts cover only 37 per cent of members' expenditures.

A member uses a common pool of services but does not know the cost of his own use of those services. Those services include such things as printing, telephone, postage, et cetera. I do acknowledge that we can demand, as I do, a monthly print-out of our telephone bills in order to keep a watchful eye on that. I find that to be a useful control.

In addition to these services, there are also the research and media monitoring provided by the House of Commons. Procedures have been developed which allow us to allocate overhead costs to individual members. I submit that rendering accounts which are not complete and accurate would be a meaningless exercise. I also believe that it would lead to a sense by our constituents

that they might have been deceived and thus the effect of the bill could be the opposite of what is intended.

The ultimate objective of such attribution of costs and disclosure would be to make MPs more cost conscious. I know that the hon. member for Abitibi believes that a 20 per cent reduction in Parliament's expenses could be achieved.

I am happy to note the work of the House management committee in this regard. Members are aware that in 1992 the committee for the first time undertook a vigorous and detailed study of the estimates of the House of Commons. The committee also made the budget planning document available to all members of the House and to the media. It was an important step in opening up the process and stimulating public and parliamentary debate on the cost of operation of the House of Commons.

In a further step the committee recommended that the area of MPs' travel should be reviewed to identify whether potential savings could be achieved. A large number of other issues were raised by individual members during the course of the committee work. These include privatization of various services and programs and reduction of the cost of householders.

I note that the hon. member who sponsored this bill sends only one householder per year, or previously did. I believe I heard him say that this year he had sent none, rather than the four which are permitted by our rules.

My principal objection to the bill is not with the concept of reducing costs, but how cost disclosure could be interpreted.

Let us look for a moment at what we would define as parliamentary functions. There are four main functions which Parliament fulfils: first, approval of supply or the funds necessary for the operation of government; second, law making by which policy principles and administrative mandates are approved; third, the calling to account of ministers under the framework of ministerial accountability; and, fourth, representing constituents in all of the above functions and acting as an intervener in the constituents' interactions with government. I wonder whether a dollar figure could be really attached to these