

Mr. Andre: I want to address the Hon. Member's comments about the so-called policy of releasing only factual information that is favourable to the Government. That is nonsense, and the Hon. Member knows it. One of the biggest releasers of information is an agency responsible to me, namely, Statistics Canada. Every day it releases information, some is favourable to the Government, some is not. There is not the slightest suggestion anywhere from the Government, in these guidelines or anywhere else, that this would somehow be filtered and that only factual, favourable information would be released.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Cassidy: Where are the impact studies?

Mr. Andre: The Hon. Member is making absurd judgments or comments on the intent. He quoted the Prime Minister's statements made during the election campaign. I am glad he did. The Hon. Member for Ottawa Centre also quoted a part of the letter which the Prime Minister released, a letter to Ministers and deputy ministers indicating the Government's policy toward communications with the public. The Hon. Member quoted only a portion of the paragraph. I should like to read the whole paragraph to demonstrate that in fact it is entirely consistent with and a fulfilment of the promise in Kingston. The opening sentence reads:

● (1630)

In view of the Government's commitment to openness—

There is a statement to deputy ministers and Ministers, made public, that the Government is committed to openness. It is exactly consistent with the promise made during the election campaign. It continues:

—Ministers have also agreed on the need to review with their Deputy Ministers the current communications policies, procedures, resources, and management structures within their departments to ensure that communications with the public is managed effectively in accordance with the priorities of the government.

Mr. Cassidy: That's it, that's it.

Mr. Andre: Exactly. The priority of the Government is openness. We are instructed to examine our structures and methods to make sure that we are consistent with the priority of the Government, which is openness.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Andre: If the Hon. Member would read that paragraph objectively instead of pejoratively, he would in fact be applauding the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) for this letter. It is an indication of our commitment to openness. The paragraph continues and suggests that at long last we have a government in Ottawa which recognizes that there is a lot of country outside the capital region. It suggests that Ministers and deputy ministers be particularly sensitive to communications to the regions of the country and that they have communication capabilities so that not only the tight little group on Parliament Hill knows what is going on but the whole country knows what is going on. That is the commitment to

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openness the Prime Minister introduced in fulfilment of his promise which the Hon. Member quoted to the House earlier.

I am surprised, although I suppose I should not be, at the crass hypocrisy of the Liberals in claiming that the Government is overly secretive. I cannot count the number of times when, as a member of the Opposition for nearly 12 years, I was stonewalled by the then Liberal government and told that it was none of my business what the government was doing. I cannot count how many times I wrote to Ministers, talked to Ministers, talked to government and talked to officials trying to get some information, only to be told that it was none of my business. Perhaps it is an exercise through which we should go. I wonder how many questions were left—

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During debate one can exaggerate, but the Hon. Minister is saying that he talked to Ministers, to public servants and to people over the years as a member of the Opposition and never got a true answer or an answer. I think that is an exaggeration. I know him to be an honest man who talked with us before. He has had information from the Public Service and from the government, and he knows it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. That is not a point of order.

Mr. Gauthier: No, but it is a good point.

Mr. Andre: At the end of my statement the Hon. Member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier) will have an opportunity to make his comments. However, it would be an interesting exercise to count the number of questions left on the Order Paper over the last 16 years which were not answered by that government. Perhaps we could have a pool. Personally I would like to pick a number somewhere in the vicinity of 10,000.

Mr. McDermid: And those were only Tom Cossitt's questions.

Mr. Gauthier: Eighty-five per cent were answered.

Mr. Andre: They were questions by Members of Parliament asking the government for factual information. They were not asking for opinion.

Mr. Gauthier: As of today, you have only answered five questions out of one hundred.

Mr. Andre: That factual information was not permitted. For the Liberal Party of Canada, with its record, to accuse this Government of excessive secrecy is like the Ayatollah Khomeini accusing Ronald Reagan of being a dictator.

The Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps) who spoke earlier delivered a tirade crammed so full of hyperbole that it was almost worthy of her predecessor. If she were sincere in her remarks, I cannot imagine what objectives she would use to describe the behaviour of the previous Liberal government.