

Supply

I would ask the hon. member to look today at the Northern Pipeline Agency and tell me maybe at some other time whether it really is doing any work. Is Mitchell Sharp still there? Who knows? He was quite a great parliamentarian.

I will have to take the hon. member's word. He is trying to cut back with the exception, perhaps, of this agency.

Mr. Kempling: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member tweaked my memory. I remember Tommy Douglas vividly. He was a great parliamentarian.

The member refers to the procedures about the estimates coming before the House. Actually it was one of the tests of a minister's ability to get his spending estimates through the House. He would bring his estimates into the House and he had to stand in his place in Committee of the Whole and get his estimates passed. If he had an easy time going through with the House and gave reasonable answers then he was considered to be a pretty good minister.

However I think the volume of expenditures has moved so greatly that time just does not permit it. Maybe we should be looking at a procedure that allows that to happen again. I know it is difficult to get into the estimates.

A few years ago we had a gentleman from Treasury Board or the Auditor General—one or the other—who was going member by member through the estimates saying: "What can we do to explain this to you that will make it easier?" A manual was going to be issued.

Then the estimates became so big. There are the supplementaries. If a manual is put on top of that then there is so much paper that it is very difficult to digest it all in the course of the year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Douglas Young (Acadie—Bathurst): First of all, Mr. Speaker although I would like to say it is a pleasure to take part in this debate on the motion for concurrence in the Main Estimates for the current fiscal year, for me and for the Canadian public the pleasure is not unadulterated.

[*English*]

I must say that in listening to the parliamentary secretary it is a major problem, as raised by my friend who spoke previously in questions and comments, that

the estimates now seem to go through the process in a very odd kind of way.

If we look at what actually is done in committee with estimates, it is very little. I find it rather sad that in this House, and in other arenas related to the parliamentary process, people will discuss matters of \$100,000 or \$1 million.

I do not want to be equated to C.D. Howe and what is a million. We all know that every dollar is important. It seems there is a lot more focus and a lot more interest on the kinds of amounts of money that we can understand and grapple with. Those are the things we pursue. Yet hundreds of millions and even billions of dollars are spent with very little public scrutiny and very little public understanding.

• (1605)

It seems to me that if we are going to recognize our obligation as parliamentarians to restore confidence in the Canadian political system and try to overcome the cynicism that is out there, then we are going to have to be far more effective in dealing with these kinds of measures.

Today we are talking about \$161 billion in spending. We talked about this since the budget process was initiated. People in committee, special interest groups around the country, individuals, organizations and those in sectors of our economy that are affected by increases and decreases and changes in the spending patterns of the government have had their say. However, I want to spend a little bit of time today trying to put the notion of spending and taxation and the financial activity of government into perspective.

There is a little quiz that I developed. I use it in various ways when I go to high schools and universities and speak to groups that are preoccupied with the debt and deficit. If we are speaking today of the government's expenditure plan involving some \$161 billion, then we are at the same time talking about the fact that the government will only raise somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$125 billion to \$130 billion. This leaves a shortfall of \$30 billion.

As I was saying to my colleague from Hamilton moments ago, it is a pathetic commentary on our system and our society that we can talk about \$161 billion as though we knew what we were talking about. For example, in speaking with young people, and some not so young who are preoccupied with debt, they are concerned about the debt because they know it is a tremendous burden on their future. They know that the kinds of opportunities that will be made available to them will not