

Corporate and Consumer Affairs

Canada and has received in some depth the attention and scrutiny that parliament is wont to give to matters of such importance.

Mr. Nielsen: Will the minister say whether the Economic Council has recommended the setting up of a new department?

Mr. Turner: Yes, I will come to that in due course. As I said at the resolution stage, I believe we are following implicitly the recommendations contained in the interim report of the Economic Council, in some cases less and in some cases more. However, I think the government has to take its responsibilities, and in those areas where we have differed I will be glad, and indeed I consider myself duty bound, to explain it to the house.

Now I should like to turn to the report of the Economic Council of Canada. Hon. members are aware that last July the Economic Council submitted an interim report on the role of the government and this department in relation to the consumer interest. The council indicated that its survey of current government activity in the area of consumer affairs had left it with two main impressions. The first was that many of the programs within the consumer field had arisen as ad hoc or particular reactions to periodic crises or pressures in particular problem areas. It said that the consumer protection programs were being carried on in departments whose primary concern was with other matters. In some cases they had not always been able to give such programs adequate attention. The council also said that there had in fact been no single part of government charged with specific responsibility for the essential task of providing a continuing review and an assessment of the total package of policies and the total package of programs relating to consumer affairs. That was their first impression.

The second impression expressed in that report was that there had been no effective means for ensuring efficient co-ordination of the administration of these programs. In this situation the council said there was a great risk of the unwarranted but understandable assumption being made that somebody else was taking responsibility for a specific problem. As a result the program might not have been discharged. At the same time the council suggested that a number of different departments might be drawn more or less independently into closely related activities which might more suitably be administered on a co-ordinated basis. The Economic Council recommended that the department for which I currently have responsibility should ensure

the co-ordination of existing programs in consumer affairs and should have the responsibility for initiating new programs to fill certain gaps in this field.

I want to make a progress report on the organization which followed the publication of the Economic Council's interim report. We now have a structure planned for a consumer branch in what I hope will be the department of corporate and consumer affairs. If parliament accepts this bill, we propose to recruit a limited number of carefully selected officials to co-ordinate existing government activities and to undertake information and research programs.

I want to make it clear, as I attempted to do at the resolution stage, that we contemplate no substantial increase in government expenditure. I am in full agreement with two important pieces of advice given by the Economic Council of Canada in its interim report: First, that government regulation of production and exchange should occur only when alternative methods are not available or are ineffective, except in matters affecting health, safety or economic fraud—and I explained the matter more fully in the resolution stage—and, second, that the growth of government bureaucracy should be kept to a minimum consistent with efficient and effective administration of the legislation.

Mr. Nielsen: Will there be a final report on consumer affairs by the Economic Council of Canada?

Mr. Turner: I cannot speak for the council, but since they use the word "interim" I hope they also contemplate the word "final".

I have already told the house that the steps we are taking here constitute a reorganization of the existing responsibilities of government. I also said that after deducting the revenues of this department from its expenditures the net cost to the taxpayer this fiscal year will be less than \$2 million. Having read *Hansard* before I came to the house I will not suggest that this is an insignificant sum of money. However, when it is considered in relation to the \$9.5 billion in the estimates, we are not going to be one of the big spenders in government. I do not expect any appreciable increase in our net expenditures as a result of this legislation, if it is to be adopted by parliament.

We intend to organize the department in the most effective way to provide a contemporary response to consumer and corporate problems. We plan to integrate our work in