

● (1710)

In closing, may I say I approve the provisions contained in this bill? They will lead to a streamlining of the responsibilities and functions of the Royal College of Dentists and the Royal Dental Examining Board. This is a good step, and it could lead to other measures which would benefit both the profession and the people at large. I am pleased to lend the support of my party to the bill and to assist in its speedy passage.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): It is my understanding that the House will now proceed to consideration of Motion No. 91 in the name of the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

[English]

TRANSPORT

REQUEST FOR COPIES OF PROGRAM FORECAST AND BUDGETS A, B, X

Mr. Terry Grier (Toronto-Lakeshore) moved:

That an order of the House do issue for a complete copy (including budgets A, B, X) of the program forecast (program review) by the department of Transport for the latest year for which parliament approved departmental expenditures.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is yet another in a series of discussions in the House of the principles which underlie this motion and which underlie a number of similar motions standing in my name. I do not propose this afternoon to repeat the arguments I have put forward in previous weeks. I wish, however, to reply to some of the contentions which were made last week or the week before by the hon. member for Nipissing (Mr. Blais) who replied on behalf of the government party to my representations.

In the first place, the hon. member for Nipissing stated, and I quote him:

The government has kept confidential the documents which assisted it in arriving at decisions because its responsibility to parliament and the people is to answer only after decisions have been taken.

The hon. member is correct in the technical, constitutional or legal sense when he makes that statement. But in the statement I have quoted he referred to the taking of a decision, and I want to suggest that the decision the government takes in respect of legislation is not a decision to act but a decision to propose measures to parliament. Until parliament approves the legislation the government lacks authority to act. So, what I am seeking in my motion is information which would acquaint members of the House as to the basis upon which the government made its decision to propose a particular piece of legislation. I suggest that the verdict of parliament upon such legisla-

Transport Budget Forecast

tion would be the better for being better informed as to the reasons behind the government's proposals.

I am not questioning the government's right to act in an executive capacity by order in council or its undoubted right to implement legislation of which parliament has approved. I am suggesting, however, that the reasons for deciding to bring a particular proposal before parliament may validly be presented to members of parliament, not merely in speeches by ministers and government supporters, but by means of supporting documentation which was available to the government itself as it took its original decision.

In the second place, the hon. member for Nipissing, and I quote him again, stated:

Under the committee system, after decisions have been made, opportunities are available to Members of Parliament to demand explanations and to ask why certain things have been done.

Again, the hon. member for Nipissing is correct in a technical sense. It is true that in the committee we have an opportunity to demand explanations. But in the first place we do not always get those explanations and, in the second place, when we do, they are seldom adequate. Then again, valuable committee time which is now taken up as members seek information which could already have been given to them might then be more constructively used to examine the purpose and implications of a proposal in greater depth.

The hon. member for Nipissing went on to say of me:

He wants to push this matter further . . . so that parliament has the power over decision-making prior to decisions being made, by reviewing administrative documents submitted to the cabinet by individual ministers.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, I am not seeking the power to judge decisions which have not been taken. I am seeking reasons for decisions which have been taken.

Supporters of the government, and I include the hon. member, acknowledge the complexity of the decision-making process, the complicated system of committees within the Privy Council structure, and so on, and they have admitted that in arriving at a final determination the government must go through a lengthy and involved procedure. Why should members of parliament not be allowed access to at least part of the information which the government itself believes to be essential in arriving at a course of action? If the government, in order to arrive at a decision, requires volumes of information, evaluations and so on, surely it follows logically that parliament, which is asked to approve proposals placed before it, should be in possession of some, at least, of that information?

May I again quote the hon. member for Nipissing? He went on to say of me:

● (1720)

He wants the whole kit and caboodle; and he wants it all produced to individual members of parliament before the decisions are made. What is even worse, after decisions are made by the government, he wants to have the power of hindsight in respect of all those documents so he can review the decision-making process and try to pick holes in it.

I suggest that that comment betrays a certain partisan defensiveness and a misinterpretation of parliament's role.