

*Private Members' Business*

Department of Finance, before the election, to submit its response to Parliament within the 150 days provided for in the Regulations for tabling a departmental response to a parliamentary committee.

The delay is frustrating for the members of the Committee on Public Accounts who worked hard to try to correct a situation that is very costly for the government. If we go back ten years, many of you will remember the scientific research tax credit, which cost the government some \$2 billion over ten months.

In 1985, the Committee on Public Accounts sharply criticized the Auditor General of Canada for not bringing earlier before Parliament the results of his audit. But the act forbids him to do so. He may table only one report annually. That is where my bill comes in. I want to change this situation. Had he informed Parliament seven months earlier, the Auditor General might have allowed us to save over \$1 billion.

[English]

In his last report the Auditor General of Canada devoted an important chapter, chapter 22, to airport transfers. The auditor might have easily presented his report in May or June 1993 when his evaluation was terminated. If so, the report could have had a great influence on the Pearson airport transaction, for example. Unfortunately the auditor's report was tabled after the event.

Chapter 15 in the same report indicated that \$587 million was spent by the government on the northern cod adjustment and recovery program without clear legislative authority. The Auditor General of Canada raised grave doubts regarding some of the hurried allowances given to those ineligible persons who ought not to have benefited from that program. The auditor might have tabled his report in March of last year rather than wait for December thereby again saving Canadians millions of dollars.

Particularly in this era of budgetary restraints it is imperative to improve governmental management practices. It is imperative for us to have better accountability for public funds. Moreover, I say that we in the Liberal Party said in our red book during the election that we would exercise unwavering discipline in controlling federal spending and would reorder current spending priorities to make sure that maximum return was obtained on each investment.

I am of the opinion that punctual reporting by the auditor without being the only solution would give the Liberal government of today additional tools to allow cutting of waste while realizing valuable objectives. Therefore the adoption of my bill would constitute a step in the right direction.

• (1355)

Some would suggest that punctual reporting, and I have heard it, would possibly reinforce or feed the media hype over this annual report. As we all know it gets the attention of the media for maybe two or three days a year, possibly a week sometimes, but no more. After that it pales into oblivion and the public accounts committee is asked to look into some things that sometimes date several years and sometimes are frustrating for us to examine because we know the press are not interested.

Let us not kid ourselves. Some people want to eliminate waste. We as parliamentarians have an obligation to the people of Canada to do our best to try to meet that challenge. Canadians want to be assured that legislators have all the information to reduce wasteful spending in the government infrastructure.

Moreover, the last annual report of the Auditor General for 1992-93 contains 775 pages. As I said it is a huge volume. It is complicated. It is indeed technical sometimes and it is very important in my view. The report, in my experience having chaired the public accounts committee, is a source of invaluable information for members of Parliament who want to know how the government administers public funds.

It brings forth information to improve the management of public funds. It would make us more efficient. It would make the government certainly more effective in trying to come to grips with the huge administration of some \$160 billion a year.

The public accounts committee, as we all know, has been a very non-partisan committee over the years. That is the way it should be. It should be able to plan and order its business in a more efficient and quicker way of doing business. It should be able to profit from the examples set in England, Australia, New Zealand and other parliamentary systems similar to ours where the study or the overview of public accounts is done on a more regular basis by Parliament.

I would be astonished, for example in my riding of Ottawa—Vanier, if a business person or somebody said to me that he had to wait a year and a half before knowing if he made a profit and that he had to wait another two years to figure out which corrective he had to use to reduce the losses. Nobody could operate a business that way. The government should not do it that way either. I would hope the House would see fit to support the bill which only presents a small amendment but in my view a very important change to the way we do business.

I mentioned at the beginning of my speech it is useful to note that the Auditor General wrote to me on March 22, 1994. I want to read into the record one paragraph of that letter if I have time: