

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, to follow up on my previous comments and questions, again I thank the parliamentary secretary for his kind words about my work on the committee. I did enjoy the work on the committee.

I have congratulated the committee on its work since the report was brought forward. The committee certainly did a tremendous amount of work. I congratulate the chairperson and the parliamentary secretary for their activity with regard to the committee as well. I wish the government had listened to the committee's recommendations because obviously we would be in a better position today with regard to this bill.

My question has to do with the departmental strategies the parliamentary secretary talked about. The bill asks the auditor general for the environment to look at departmental strategies. The bill gives the departmental officials two years to write those strategies and then exempts them from redoing it again for another three years. Does the parliamentary secretary know the purpose of the auditor general for the first two years while the departmental people are writing these strategies we are all supposed to be so excited about?

Mr. Lincoln: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises an important point which has also been raised by the official opposition. Obviously during the first two years the commissioner will have to set up the office and will have to organize the whole work of the auditor general's department relating to the environment.

Today the auditor general carries out a significant amount of work on the question of environment and sustainable development. The commissioner will take over this work and will assist the auditor general in carrying out this work further.

Also, the bill provides a very important function which cannot be lessened or minimized which is the power of Canadians to be able to submit petitions to the commissioner about government performance in sustainable development. These petitions from Canadians will certainly go forward and the commissioner will have to deal with them.

The two years are a very wise investment in time. At least the office will be well prepared to deal with infractions that will ensue and will also help the auditor general with his important work on environment and sustainable development.

• (1350)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the legislation we are discussing this morning, that is Bill C-83, is to amend the Auditor General Act so as, first, to ensure that environmental considerations in the context of sustainable development are taken into account in the auditor general's reports to the House of Commons. Second, it provides for the appointment of a Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. Third, it imposes requirements for responding to petitions received by the auditor general about

federal environmental matters in the context of sustainable development.

So that it be clear for all constituents, a petition does not necessarily have to be signed by hundreds of people. A complaint made by only one person will be processed normally as if it were endorsed by one or two thousand people.

Four, it requires monitoring and reporting to the House of Commons on petitions and the extent to which departments have met the objectives, and implemented the plans set out in their sustainable development strategies. Fifth and finally, to require each department to establish and table in the House a strategy for sustainable development.

By tabling the bill in this House, the Liberal government across the way will be able to claim that it is respecting one of its campaign commitments as set out in the red book. In this connection, the red book stated—if I may, I shall repeat the exact quote that the Minister of the Environment gave a few minutes ago—that a Liberal government will “appoint an Environmental Auditor General, reporting directly to Parliament, with powers of investigations similar to the powers of the Auditor General. This office would report annually to the public on how successfully federal programs and spending are supporting the shift to sustainable development. The report would also evaluate the implementation and enforcement of federal environmental laws. Individuals could petition the Environmental Auditor General to conduct special investigations when they see environmental policies or laws being ignored or violated”. End of quote from the famous red book which, incidentally, has become very rare and therefore worth its weight in gold.

The red book is now being kept hidden away under the counter, and it is very difficult for anyone outside the Liberal Party to get a copy.

It was, however, at the suggestion of members of the opposition that the government decided to modify the Auditor General Act to integrate the position of Environmental Auditor General. Let us indicate right at the outset that the Deputy Prime Minister would have liked this position of Environmental Auditor General to report to her department, no doubt out of a desire to build up her influence within her government or her party, or maybe both. But that is another story we can get to later in more detail.

Here I would like to make a parenthetical remark. A few minutes, a few seconds ago, the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of the Environment stated in his response to one of my colleagues that the environmentalists and ecologists wanted things to work out.

• (1355)

He says he is convinced that there is some overlap and duplication in terms of public servants, services and money, but what people, and particularly ecologists, really want is for the operation to work. I am almost tempted to tell the parliamentary