

have expanded throughout Canada. The regions can speak for themselves and do not need the protection the other place traditionally provided them.

Given the fact that my colleague has had time to consider the proposal put forward by the Reform Party and has requested a widening of the terms of reference, just like the Official Opposition yesterday, is he also ready to add to these terms of reference to include consideration of our institutions and of some of our traditions?

• (1245)

Mr. Pomerleau: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I thank the hon. member for his question. It is something we occasionally discussed together outside the House.

Indeed, the mandate could be widened to include the other place, an institution of a more traditional type which may not have all the required effectiveness in the legislative process.

It is clear that in Quebec we have been talking for a long time about abolishing the other place in order to reduce spending and to send the population a clear message saying that those who work here do so with full public knowledge and in an effective manner, and that the same cannot be said for the other place. This does not reflect in any way I am sure—and my colleague was right to make that very clear—on the quality of the people who sit in that chamber. I know, I spoke to a few of them on occasions.

I also talked occasionally with members of the Reform party, during conventions, and I was surprised to find out how much, on the whole, they believe in the need for cuts—deep cuts—in public spending. I believe that the way they speak in the House, even if it is a bit unusual at the present time, shows that have a deep desire to be real representatives of their constituents.

I am sure that Westerners, like other people, would be in favour of seriously studying the possibility of doing away with an institution which, at the present time, has only traditional duties.

Mr. Bob Ringma (Nanaimo—Cowichan): Mr. Speaker, I could say to my colleague that we agree on several points. We agree in particular when you say that we should try to save taxpayers money.

[English]

I would like to continue the debate on the motion on the Auditor General's report by reading two sentences to give it a bit of continuity.

On page 597 of the Auditor General's report it states:

We recommend that the department provide complete and accurate information to Parliament on the full cost of using government aircraft to transport users such as the Prime Minister, ministers, and other VIPs.

Supply

It goes on to say further:

—the Department, in co-operation with other appropriate departments, should conduct a review of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of providing government aircraft to transport such users.

I would like to continue the discussion of this proposal on the part of the Auditor General in a pragmatic vein. This is brought forward not just because of the news media talking about the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs spending \$173,000 to make two speaking tours. I would like to go further into the background and say that this situation has been going on for years and years. The press always picks it up. It is as if it is a scandal to be flying around in jet aircraft.

Let us go back even further to my own experience in the city of Ottawa in another department, specifically national defence, some 15 or more years ago. I recall at the time feeling very upset when the government of the day offloaded part of its problems on to the Department of National Defence and said: "You fellows take over the running of these jet aircraft. You can take it out of your budget and you can run it and take the flack". I thought at the time it was dirty pool and I still think so today.

• (1250)

What this underlines is that far too often its own politics override common sense. Politics seems to have the effect of saying: "We don't care how much it costs or who carries the load; it will go on".

The whole issue of the use of government jet aircraft, whether it is housed in the Department of National Defence or wherever, illustrates what is bad about government and politics. It also illustrates precisely why the people in our ridings are angry, why they have displayed their anger over the last couple of years and why they say this has to stop.

DND now runs 16 Challenger jets. Why were they purchased in the first place? It is not because 16 jets are needed to run ministers and the Prime Minister around the country and to foreign lands. It is done as a political gesture, let us say, to Canadair, to Quebec, saying it is just money so let us give them a contract and buy these nice Canadian products. We cannot afford to do that given the state of our deficit spending and the state of the total debt.

I am really talking about the attitude of government, not the current government, but all governments one after the other. The attitude seems to be, why not buy a few more jet aircraft, it just costs a few more millions of dollars. That is not good enough.

The Department of National Defence today is absorbing more cuts. It is being cut to the extent that it no longer has the resources required to continue the peacekeeping operations that Canadians and this government continue to expect of it around the world.