

Government Orders

this scheme. That is not fair and that is not right. We should have a transparent system.

• (1100)

Just before the last election there was a bit of a furore in the newspapers about former Prime Minister Mulroney donating his personal papers to the National Archives. Someone said they saw a figure of how much of a tax break he was to get. The gentleman subsequently said he had made an error and he did not know why he quoted that figure. That is not the point. The point is that we have no idea how much people get in terms of a tax break for the donations they make. These things are protected through the Income Tax Act. We have a situation where people are making donations and we have no idea how much they are being appraised for because that would violate their privacy. Is that the best system?

It was not very long ago that someone at the National Gallery of Canada decided it was a good idea to buy "The Voice of Fire". It was an American art piece. It was three stripes. It cost approximately \$1.8 million. People went absolutely berserk, and rightfully so. In my judgment it was a complete waste of money.

If we visit the gallery and look at the comment book, people have said over and over again: "The emperor has no clothes". I think Canadians feel that way too. The point is that we know how much money we paid for that piece of art, but for these other things we do not know how much revenue we are forgoing when we purchase them. That is wrong. It should be out in the open. We should know how much we are paying, either through a tax credit or directly for items that are purchased on our behalf by our government. That is how an open democracy should work.

The legislation is completely contrary to that. That is why we should not be fooling around with the amendment to the legislation but should instead be repealing the whole bill. It is absolutely ridiculous.

I want to talk about some of the specifics of the legislation. The legislation offers an appeal process over and above the cultural export review board. If people do not feel they are getting a fair price from the review board for their donation they can ultimately appeal it to Revenue Canada. If memory serves, that was the situation prior to 1993 or 1991, I have forgotten which. At any rate we would be returning to that situation.

I question whether we should have the review board at all. It is another layer of bureaucracy. How are the people appointed to the review board? They are appointed the same way everyone else is appointed to government boards. They are appointed on the basis of who they know. They are appointed because of their connections. It is quite conceivable that a former prime minis-

ter, such as Brian Mulroney, could donate papers and have the decision made on the value of those papers by people he appointed to the board. It is ridiculous.

A few times the National Archives of Canada has gone to the board and the board has said this is the value of the former prime minister's papers. We never find out what it is, but those people who may indeed have been appointed by the prime minister are making those judgments.

• (1105)

This appeal process will allow us to go to Revenue Canada and ultimately I suppose to the tax courts. However, our sources tell us that we have approximately 6,000 cases before the tax court today, 6,000 backlogged cases. Why are we bringing more stuff to these people? Why are we bringing more decisions for them to make? I would think there are more important things for those people to be doing than arguing about the price of somebody's dinosaur fossil or their three stripes on a piece of paper, their so-called art.

I make another point about the legislation. I believe the legislation, which goes back to 1977, and the art bank, which falls under the purview of the Canada Council, have worked against artists. They have hurt artists by flooding the market with all kinds of art and alleged art that has no business being out there in the marketplace today. We have something like 18,000 pieces of art stored in warehouses today, stuff that is supposed to be in the art bank.

We have this legislation that encourages art galleries to go ahead and purchase these things because the money is not coming out of their budgets. All they are doing is going to the people at the export review board and saying: "We think this is pretty good. Put an evaluation on it. The guy is going to give it to us. Whether or not we hang it on the wall now or at any time in the future is really irrelevant, because it does not cost us a thing". They are not working with a budget. They can bring in as much of this stuff as they want. The only ones who pay are the taxpayers.

The people in this article say it is a great scheme and everybody wins. It is win for the art gallery and win for the artist, but it is big time lose for taxpayers who are out millions and millions and millions of dollars in revenue. There are no safeguards built in to ensure the galleries and the museums are using their power to do this responsibly. There is no check in place to make sure that happens.

This is horrible legislation. I would argue that before 1977 we had very good art galleries. We were able to hold on to our works of art. We were able to maintain different pieces of important cultural property because people ultimately gave these things to