

that I do not know what the practice is here. Perhaps my house leader could advise me whether it is appropriate for someone to make a substantive speech on this interim supply bill?

• (1510)

Hon. Royce Frith (Leader of the Opposition): I think perhaps there is a misunderstanding. It often occurs that we do not spend much time on a supply bill because the Estimates that are the basis for the supply bill have been referred to the committee on National Finance and dealt with there.

However, in a way, the supply bill is very closely linked to the report of the National Finance committee and there is no reason why, if there are some items that any senator wants to deal with, even if it amounts to dealing with them again to underline some item that is in the Estimates that are the basis for the supply bill, that we would not do so. It is just that after reference of the Estimates to the committee and their being dealt with in the committee, the Senate does not normally refuse the government supply, but it certainly does not have to give it supply without comment.

I imagine the bill needs to be passed before the end of the month, but certainly if the chairman of the committee wants to make some comments about what happened in the committee, or something that was not discussed otherwise in the Senate, I think that would be perfectly in order.

Senator Olson: That is exactly where I run into the problem. The Main Estimates have been referred to the committee, there is no doubt about that, but we have not even begun to deal with them yet. There has been no consideration by members on either side of the house of those Estimates. There is no doubt about that.

I acknowledge that when we do get to them, which I think will be next Wednesday afternoon, March 31, we will begin the process of looking at this. But in the meantime we are being asked to approve the expenditure of about \$40 billion, three-twelfths of the total estimate in this appropriation bill, Bill C-120.

It might be that in the past the committee did in fact have a chance to look at the Main Estimates — not pass them or refer them back, but at least a chance to look at them — and so far we have not. That is the simple truth. We are about to start that process next week.

In any event, I had a fairly long, detailed speech ready, but I will set that aside and take the short one and simply deal with some of the highlights of this. This is a very large item. It is a minimum of three-twelfths and in some cases more than three-twelfths of \$161 billion. I will touch on the main highlights of it and we will deal with the rest of it later.

Honourable senators will recall that in the December 1992 economic and fiscal statement, the Minister of Finance an-

nounced further expenditure reductions to address slippage in the budget deficit target. That brought about the economic situation as well as new strategic investment initiatives to stimulate some economic growth. This was a major change from the budget speech made in February of 1992, primarily because of a major shortfall in revenue from what was anticipated when the budget speech was made. I think that is probably what they said.

After incorporating these reductions in the new investment initiatives, total budgetary expenditures for 1993-94 are expected to increase by 1.5 per cent to \$160.7 billion. Total expenditures, less public debt charges for 1993-94, as presented in the economic and fiscal statement, are expected to be about \$120.9 billion or 1.7 per cent higher than forecasted spending for 1992-93.

Over the period from 1984-85 to 1993-94, growth in programming expenditures has averaged about 3.7 per cent, compared with an average inflation rate of 4 per cent for the same period, or a total decline of 2.6 per cent.

The Main Estimates set out details of \$161.1 billion for planned government spending. The year-over-year growth in Main Estimates is .4 per cent. There are a number of spending reductions and other adjustments which are not reflected in the Main Estimates because they depend on the passage of separate legislation.

Those are just some of the highlights that ought to be pointed out. I think there may be some very valid criticism of the first three-twelfths or 25 per cent of these Estimates that should be raised, but I will leave that for another day. In the meantime, we will have an opportunity to ask questions of the Treasury Board respecting these Estimates and then, no doubt, a number of the members of this chamber, particularly those who are members of the National Finance committee, can come here with far more detailed and very proper criticism of some of the expenditures that are planned in this interim supply bill.

Senator Frith: Honourable senators, if I may be permitted an addendum from the procedural aspect, as I understand it — and there are senators here with more experience than I in the whole process of Estimates and appropriation bills — the principle of what we are engaged in right now is that the Main Estimates come and are referred to the committee. The government needs money in the interim. It does not want to say to the committee, "Give us this money. Hurry up and finish your Estimates consideration." Any government is saying, as I understand it, "Give us some of the money in the meantime in order that we can operate, but that is totally without prejudice to what you are doing on the Estimates."

That is why I asked the Leader of the Government for a copy of his notes, which he quite promptly gave to me. There is the sentence in here that I thought would be here, namely, "I should point out that, as usual, in no case is Parliament being asked to pass the entire amount of a vote".