

Access to Information

stopped. I think the government has achieved this balancing act in this bill.

We should all listen very carefully to the groups which will come forward with their particular points of view. As members of Parliament we have received the usual lobbying documents in this particular case. I have copies of Access documents about which the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) spoke. We will look at these documents very carefully. I am particularly happy to have heard the minister indicate when he introduced the bill this afternoon that we will be receiving amendments with open minds. In fact, I have some particular amendments which I want to bring forward. I will be attending committee meetings diligently in order to see that my points of view are brought forward. I trust that the opposition members who have spoken this afternoon will be doing the same.

I hope we all realize that we are producing something as nearly perfect as we can but not totally perfect and that we are not creating some kind of a panacea. We will create a tool which perhaps will make this House more lively from time to time and will afford the press gallery an opportunity to obtain information which its members now feel is not readily available.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Will it mean more brown envelopes?

Mr. Daudlin: It will probably reduce the number of brown envelopes being used on the hill; perhaps that will be cost-effective. But I have the feeling that all of us on the Hill, being as busy as we are and having a volume of information going across our desks, will find that access to more information, in addition to not being a panacea, may have the effect of glutting our offices as well. I trust that when we have this kind of information available to us and it is not accomplishing the kind of miracle which I know some hope it will, we will not blame the legislation. I hope we will not come up with some kind of perverse decision about the government making certain that this legislation does not work. If it works at all, it will have done so because, by putting forward the bill, by stating the concept and by coming up with these words, the civil servants, whom I think we all recognize are here to serve Canadians, and not somehow not to do their will, will recognize that it is the wish and the will of this Parliament and Canadians, wherever they are, to have access to information being produced by those same civil servants at the request of and on behalf of the government. Knowing that their will has been expressed will, in fact, indicate through their own actions the kind of openness which the government has expressed is its will in this bill.

● (1740)

If that takes place, and I am almost certain it must as a result of what we are doing here, then I think we will have accomplished a step toward what we are seeking. As I say, it will be a panacea for us. But certainly, contrary to the expressed opinion of the hon. member for Nepean-Carleton, it

is a giant leap forward, not a giant leap sideways or backward, as he would rather characterize it.

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak briefly on the freedom of information legislation. I think it is a step in the right direction, and I would like to commend the government for bringing it forward. There are many changes which we would like to see made in it. We will be addressing those here today, and we will be moving some amendments in the committee.

I think this legislation goes a long way toward improving the accountability of government. I think Parliament itself is fairly accountable, since we are before the eyes of the public. What we say and do here is written into the verbatim transcript of *Hansard*. Quite often, when we become involved with government and some of its programs, information which should be accessible to the public at large and to members of Parliament in some cases is hidden away. It is not released at times when it actually should be in order to make government more accountable. I think the disclosure aspect with respect to many pieces of information is necessary so that members of Parliament and the public can be made aware of some of the things which our government—either elected members or public employees—does.

A few instances come to mind in which we can actually obtain more information about our own country in the United States than we can right here at home. The most recent incident is with respect to the events at Gagetown. A few members of Parliament from this caucus had to obtain their information about the spraying of Agent Orange in New Brunswick from the American government. We should be able to find information about our country here at home and not in another country. We should have full disclosure in these cases which affect the public to a large degree.

There are other matters about which information would be very useful to me as a member of Parliament. This is particularly true in cases where I have gone to government departments and asked for internal documents which contain the interpretation of the statutes or supplementary regulations which are used to enforce those statutes. In some cases I find it is impossible to obtain that information from government departments. This puts us in a very awkward position when we are dealing with the public and trying to overcome some of the problems they run into in dealing with certain government programs. As I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, I think this measure goes a long way toward accountability.

There have been different reports on this subject, recommending government accountability. The D'Avignon report and the Lambert commission report come to mind. The freedom of information legislation is certainly not the be-all and end-all, but it is a step in the right direction. I am a member of the public accounts committee. Quite often cases come before us which would not be there if we had a freedom of information act in place in this country.