

indicated in the amendment moved by the hon. member for Saint-Henri-Westmount is quite acceptable.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I understand the thrust of it now as it was explained to me by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, and it is quite acceptable.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I understand I have the floor. I yielded the floor on a point of order. It was not a point of order, but clearly a statement by the President of the Privy Council. Do I have to sit down and listen to another speech?

Mr. Kempling: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I just want to correct the opposition House leader—

Mr. MacEachen: Your Chinese friend.

Mr. Kempling: —my Chinese friend, Gambay. In his remarks, he commented that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Schellenberger) was not in the House on Friday. I can assure him that he was here all through that debate. In fact, he was trying to rise to speak in the debate.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the chief government whip for clarifying that point. I regret that the parliamentary secretary did not, in the normal way, lead the debate; I understand the purposes. But I do want to thank the Prime Minister for coming into the House, accepting the amendment and putting the President of the Privy Council straight once again. I wish he would come in more often.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McCain): Shall the amendment carry?

Amendment (Mr. Johnston) agreed to.

Mr. Simon de Jong (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, I think the events of the last three quarters of an hour could have been put into five minutes had the government been on top of things and had the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Stevens) been here to see his motion through the House. It is an important motion and there are a fair number of implications in it.

The present chairman of the public accounts committee has made a very good case to rely upon that committee, although I can understand the motivation behind the government's wanting a special investigation into government cost overruns. There is no doubt but that there have been some very serious and major cost overruns amounting to billions of dollars. I understand the desire of the government to get a handle on this and to investigate why these overruns occur and be able to put

Cost Overruns

a stop to them. As a member of the public accounts committee, reviewing the report of the Auditor General and listening to some of the testimony I have been amazed by the lacklustre administrations in the past. I was amazed when I discovered that in public services over 50 per cent of the contracts were entered into without tender, and that 10 per cent of the contracts were done totally on an oral basis, without any written document. I stated in committee that this was a Mickey Mouse operation. It just blew my mind, Mr. Speaker. There is no doubt the Auditor General has zeroed in on this insanity in his report and that he has made some worth-while recommendations to stop it in the future.

On the one hand, we recognize the importance of the public accounts committee, but on the other hand we recognize the desire of the government to give particular attention to cost overruns. I am glad that the government has accepted the amendment. I think the motion as it stands is strengthened and we will be supporting it.

It has often been suggested that members in this particular corner of the House are crazy spenders and that we are really not concerned with a properly managed government enterprise. This is far from the truth. If one looks at the record of the provincial government of Saskatchewan, one will find that the public debt is very low. In fact, in 1976 it was the lowest in the country. Perhaps for the record I might just include figures concerning the public debt in the various provinces. For example, the public debt in British Columbia was \$1,840 per person; in Alberta—such a rich province—the figure was \$1,880 per person; in Saskatchewan the figure was only \$960; in Manitoba the figure was \$2,589; in Ontario, another Conservative province, the figure was \$2,059; in Quebec the figure was \$1,803; in New Brunswick the figure was \$1,978; in Nova Scotia the figure was \$1,886; in Prince Edward Island it was \$1,042; and in Newfoundland, \$3,274. It was the socialist province of Saskatchewan that had the lowest debt per capita.

We have one of the best managed government operations in Saskatchewan. We do not allow the type of cost overruns that the previous Liberal government and the various Conservative governments throughout this country have allowed. If there is a cost overrun, it is not added to the general budget. What happens in Saskatchewan is that another department or another project is cut. Throughout the seventies Saskatchewan has had balanced budgets. If a deficit does occur in one year, it is then made up in the other year. The province of Saskatchewan has had sound business practices.

The federal government meanwhile has experienced major deficits not only in government spending and overrunning of costs, but also on the revenue side. Such giveaways as MURBs and drilling incentives have made the revenue side a very uncertain factor. There have been major giveaways resulting in some major deficits.

We have also experienced ongoing deficits in the country because of the general economic picture. For example, slow-downs in the economy and an improperly planned economy result in declines in government revenues.