

Private Members' Business

options announced by the minister himself—to wait for the report from this consultation before passing Bill C-17.

No, when it comes to attacking the poorest people in our society, the Liberal government is in a hurry. To help those who need jobs, they propose measures and studies and suggest that those people wait for the result of these studies. They say one thing about jobs and another about cuts.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1345)

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL ACT

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier) moved that Bill C-207, an act to amend the Auditor General Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to introduce Bill C-207 and to recommend that it be passed.

The purpose of this bill is to amend the Auditor General Act, in order to allow the Auditor General to report to the House upon completion of his report or as he deems necessary.

I am the adoptive sponsor of this legislation, since many other members of this House have thought of this initiative. As well, former colleagues in previous Parliaments have tried to have such a measure passed under circumstances which may have been different from those prevailing today.

This private member's bill was approved by nearly all of the Public Accounts Committee chairpersons of the last 15 or 16 years. The bill is also based on several recommendations from the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, and others. I am pleased to say that the Auditor General of Canada, Mr. Desautels, also gave me his support in a three-page letter which he sent to me last March 22, and which I will be glad to show to hon. members if they wish to take a look at it.

The Auditor General of Canada is a senior civil servant of the Parliament of Canada; he is an official of this House. This is a very important position. That person has the responsibility of reviewing expenditures authorized by the House, and must tell us if these expenditures are done in an efficient and effective manner, and if they meet the objectives.

So, the Auditor General's report, which is currently tabled annually—members are familiar with this thick document containing about 750 pages—is very important, since it allows us to evaluate the government's business and strategic management. This report provides essential data to help parliamentarians and government to better evaluate the relevancy of a program, and to

correct within a reasonable delay administrative practices which are not sound.

At present, the Auditor General must table his report on or before December 31, in the year to which the report relates. Yet, the evaluation included in the report covers the fiscal year ending on March 31 of the previous year. Since the evaluation of a department or an agency can take up to two years, this means that the information contained in the Auditor General's annual report is sometimes more than three years old. This, in my opinion, hinders the efforts of the House to make the government and its management accountable to Canadians. The information is often not up to date and even less relevant.

Indeed, sometimes, after so many years, managers responsible for the activities scrutinized have been transferred, or the incumbent at the time the Public Accounts Committee conducts its review has no idea of what happened, or was not there at the time, or does not care about what happened or what was reviewed by the Auditor General.

Of course, a department's management team may have changed since the evaluation was done, since the department is informed during the evaluation conducted by the Auditor General. In fact, it even participates in the exercise and it is invited by the Auditor General to submit reasons explaining the situation which will be exposed in the annual report.

• (1350)

Generally speaking, however, it is only after the Auditor General of Canada has tabled his report in the House that we parliamentarians are informed that departments or agencies are under pressure to make the necessary changes to these bad administrative practices.

Delays cost taxpayers billions of dollars. I will give you just a few of many examples. In his assessment of programs for seniors, as described in chapter 18 of his last report, the Auditor General of Canada observed significant deficiencies in the management of the Canada Pension Plan program. For instance, pensions were paid to deceased beneficiaries. Systems and procedures were inadequate to identify, control and collect these overpayments.

According to the Auditor General, overpayments range from \$120 million to \$220 million. If the act had allowed him to, the Auditor General could have tabled his report four months earlier, thus helping to save a large part of the hundreds of millions of dollars lost.

The dividends paid to Canadian companies by foreign affiliates have deprived the government of hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues. I am not exaggerating, as close to \$400 million have been lost.

Before the 1993 general election was called, the Committee on Public Accounts tabled a substantive report proposing measures to correct these practices costing money to the government. In the time available between the audit and the tabling of the report, the committee would have been able to ask the