Clearly there are reasons for some of these corporations to be agents rather than non–agents of the crown. There are also reasons why their employees are not public servants. Bill C–263, in my opinion, does not deal with the importance of these reasons sufficiently clearly.

Experience over the last 10 years has shown that generally there may be merit in bringing other corporations under a modified form of accountability framework similar to the regime now in place for the CBC. Bill C–263 does not provide for these modifications which I believe are necessary.

I am confident that additional efforts will be made by this government to balance improvements in accountability for exempt crown corporations with the desirable degree of independence. In fact, the bill assists us in doing this.

Owing to the reservations and inconsistencies in the approach reflected in Bill C–263—and I do not say that unkindly because I recognize that the hon. member did not have all of the resources available to him—I must declare that I cannot recommend support for this bill as presented in the House. However, I wish to state that, notwithstanding my opposition to the bill, the government is committed to sound financial management for all of its crown corporations. Improvements can always be sought and we will make them.

• (1110)

We recognize that the situation for the exempt crown corporations named in the hon. member's bill is unique and that the bill fails to adequately deal with that fact. This does not mean that we are blindly opposed to a re–examination of how to best ensure appropriate accountability.

The President of the Treasury Board will therefore communicate with his colleagues responsible for these corporations asking them to review once more the opportunities to improve the accountability system now in place for each of them. This examination process would be done on a case by case basis respecting the special needs of each corporation's mandate. It would include examining the need for changes to legislation paralleling the model for CBC if appropriate.

There are several ways to deal with this. I am confident that in partnership with the directors and managers of crown corporations, the government will continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to managing the corporations effectively and efficiently with due regard for all of the best and most sound principles of accountability to the taxpayer.

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C–263 ensures that the federal government is accountable to the Canadian taxpayer. I feel strongly that members from all sides of the House should rally in support of Bill C–263 so that we can honestly say that we have tried to respond to the wishes of the people who sent us here.

As members know, in the 1993 fiscal year crown corporations incurred losses totalling some $57 million. Their net borrowing from the Government of Canada amounted to $14.2 billion. Crown corporations received $4.6 billion from government through budgetary appropriations.

Our task in this Chamber is to ensure that every government department and agency be accountable for every tax dollar spent. I dare say that everyone in the House wants to be able to say to the people at home that we are responsible to the people who ultimately pay the bills: the Canadian taxpayer.

The auditor general has a key role to play in this regard. In many cases, which I will refer to in a moment, the auditor general has not only made available the exact facts and figures concerning the activities and performance of the federal government but the auditor general has been able to improve such activities and performance levels by dissecting and evaluating agencies and departments.

No shame is involved in the work performed by the auditor general. The auditor's detection of poor performance and recommendations is seen by Canadians as routine and to be expected. Canadian firms large and small perform audits on their activities and performance. Often audits show they are on the right track with objectives and sometimes they must swallow tough medicine to cure ailments detected in their business by such audits.

This is a fact of life and it should apply to government as well. Canadians expect their government to follow the good business practices followed in the private sector.

No one can deny the performance of auditors general in recent history. In fact progress has been made. The auditor general has the power to follow up on his recommendations. The result has been that in many cases Canadians are realizing better value for their tax dollars because of the efforts of the auditor general.

With reforms instituted in 1984, most crown corporations have operated within the accountability framework established under part X of the Financial Administration Act. Part X of the act requires each crown corporation to submit an annual report. The annual report, in addition to its financial statement and the auditor's report also presents information on how well the objectives of the corporation were reached during the reporting period. Second, crown corporations are expected to submit a corporate plan and third, budget summaries for tabling in Parliament. These are good measures. In my view these requirements are basic and simple. They are not unreasonable and yet we have a system in government in which crown corporations are not required to do these basics.