

Government Orders

I would suggest that is good common sense. I would suggest that the Minister of Justice is right on. That is the Liberal vision. That is the Canadian vision.

Mr. Russell MacLellan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to express my support for Bill C-106.

The legislation we are considering responds to the urgent need for a permanent body to advise the government on the improvement, modernization and reform of the laws of Canada. As this bill makes clear, there are many requirements to be met if this work is to succeed. We must have openness of process and the focusing of a multi-disciplined expertise on these issues.

Something else that is required is a close attention to the matter of costs by the commission both in its methods and in its goals. This was a concern expressed by the Reform Party. It is this aspect of the legislation I want to concentrate on today.

In the context of this bill, there are two aspects to the challenge of efficiency. One is the need for the commission itself to meet the test of cost effectiveness, both in its organizational architecture and in its approach. The other is the requirement that the commission's work contribute to the cost effectiveness of the Canadian legal system in general.

The structure of the commission supports these goals. Four of the five commissioners will serve on a part time basis. The members of the advisory council will serve without pay. So will the members of the temporary study panels that the commission will create to provide expert assistance on the specific issues of the day. Hon. members will also find that the administrative and the operational arrangements visualized in the bill reflect the concerns for costs.

The legislation steers the commission away from the pitfall of trying to do everything itself. As the preamble makes clear, it will promote partnerships with a wide range of interested groups and individuals, including the academic community.

The commission will save money by sharing services wherever practical. For instance, the previous commission maintained an in-house library. The new commission will make use of existing facilities. This approach is implicit in the administrative apparatus. The commission will be served by a secretariat of no more than eight people.

Unlike its predecessor body, the commission will not retain a significant body of full time researchers but will make greater use of contract help. There are several advantages to this arrangement. The most obvious is that one avoids having to hire an in-house expert specialist for every issue or alternatively, to expend time in bringing in-house staff up to speed on new agenda items.

• (1235)

Hon. members will also note that the bill designates the commission as a departmental corporation. This too impinges on cost effectiveness. It allows the commission to receive gifts, bequests and other donations from outside sources and to reimburse some costs through the sales of its publications.

The important question is what it will all cost. The government said as early as in the red book and has kept saying since that the commission will operate on a budget of \$3 million a year, all of which will come from funds already voted. This is Spartan fare indeed considering that the previous law commission operated on approximately \$5 million a year in its last operating year. Ten years ago it would not have been possible to tackle a task of this magnitude within these limits. What makes it possible today is the structure and the *modus operandi* outlined in the bill. What in turn makes that possible is new technology.

The bill before us recognizes the importance of that factor. The preamble incorporates as a guiding principle the requirement that the commission use new technology wherever appropriate in order to achieve "efficiency in its operations and effectiveness in its results". The commission will do so in every phase of its operation.

For example, a large part of law reform is research, the painstaking gathering, sharing and storing of information. The use of modern information technology will make it easier and cheaper to do all of these things. The same technology will cut other costs down to size.

For example, law reform is envisaged in this legislation as a consultative process in which people from many fields and regions will present their viewpoints and reason together. In the days when that required a convergence of experts from all over Canada to one location, that activity alone would bite large holes into the operating budget. Today fortunately we can achieve that meeting of minds at a much lower cost by making intelligent use of information technologies, for example through on-line networking, teleconferencing and video conferencing.

These new tools can also lighten the administrative load. The birth of a new organization no longer has to mean the making of a new multi-layered mini bureaucracy. On-line networking for example makes it possible for organizations to share personnel, pay and other services. The commission will take full advantage of these opportunities.

This bill is a mandate for the pursuit of efficiency, both in the internal workings of the commission and the interpretation of its mandate.

As the bill says, one function of the commission will be to recommend measures to make the legal system itself more efficient and economical. As the commission considers which of various options for reform to recommend, it will give full weight to the element of costs, both the immediate ones and those associated with downstream economic and social impacts.