

This, from the same page, is the program description:

Operations—Develops and ensures the effective application of financial administration legislation, policies, standards, systems and procedures to provide public assurance that the financial resources of the government are properly managed, controlled and accounted for.

—Develops policies to ensure that satisfactory procedures are established to measure and report the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs.

Administration—The Office of the Comptroller General; financial, personnel and administrative services.

In other words, the office and the role of the comptroller general are mechanistic. They are to ensure that proper controls will be established. That is a mechanical operation. It is not, as set out, under Evaluation and Planning in the program description of the Treasury Board—

—undertake in-depth policy analysis and program evaluation related to the major sectors of the economy; provide economic briefings; collaborate with other federal departments and agencies in medium term planning and evaluation studies; provide research and analytical support to the other branches of the secretariat; and administer . . . grants as listed in the estimates.

In the amendment, which stands in the name of my hon. friend, we have put in precisely those functions which have been described in the estimates. The only thing is, the description in the estimates can be changed from year to year. In other words, parliament has no control over it. Unless it is contained in a statute so that everyone can see, that will continue to be the position. The statutes have far wider coverage than the estimates. Apart from a few parliamentarians and public servants, there is hardly anyone in this country who knows his way around this book. And it is in this book, the Blue Book of estimates for the year 1978-79, that the duties of the comptroller general are designated. Treasury Board, in its wisdom, can, in the preparation of the estimates for 1979-80, change those duties around by 180 degrees—and who would be wiser? Certainly not the public. It is this to which we object.

The office of comptroller general was set up by a government which was dragged, kicking and scrambling, through the door, because of representations made, not once, not twice, but at least three times by the Auditor General, and in the face of continued criticism from the opposition. As a result, we get this grudging, half-hearted measure. This is not the way to go about it, Mr. Speaker. I have no objection whatsoever to the definition of the duties of the comptroller general as outlined in the estimates book because they are parallel to those we have provided in our amendment to the bill. But there is an important difference. Under the terms of the amendment his duties would be defined by statute to be seen by all and they would not be subject to change except by an amendment to the bill which would require debate in parliament.

If this man is to be a watchdog on behalf of parliament, then parliament should set his duties, not Treasury Board. I think I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that in the event of a change in government this, too, will be an undertaking: we shall see that the duties of the comptroller general are enshrined in the Financial Administration Act.

This morning I had a further opportunity of discussing with the new Comptroller General a subject which I have taken up

### *Financial Administration Act*

at various times with a number of deputy ministers during the examination of estimates. I believe I have had a clear exchange of views with the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras), with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien), and with the deputy minister of finance and, now, with the Comptroller General.

● (1622)

I am interested in increasing the effectiveness of members by making available to them many of the reports to which I referred when I was outlining the program description of the central administration of the public service program at Treasury Board. It says, and I quote:

On the basis of the analysis of departmental plans and programs to recommend to the Government the acceptance or modification of specific expenditure proposals in order to:

- reflect the priorities which the government assigns to the objectives;
- increase the effectiveness of existing and proposed programs;
- increase the efficiency with which the manpower, facilities, equipment, materials and supplies are used in the operation of programs; . . .

And ultimately to develop the estimates for the approval of parliament. I am asking that the reports which are made at that time be made available to members of parliament and to heads of departments so that if there are mistakes in one particular area, or problems to solve, the solutions or the proposals to solve those problems will be available to other sectors of the government and to members of parliament who are asked to pass on close to \$50 billion in estimates.

Based on what information are members of parliament asked to pass on these estimates? It is difficult even for one who is well versed in the Blue Book to understand what is really happening, and it becomes far worse when we consider that on the average a minister will appear not more than about three times, for an hour and a half at the most each time, to answer questions about the administration and the policies of his department and the spending programs which are outlined in the Blue Book. Let us consider the small amount of time that is available to each member to question ministers and, of course, the time used to answer his questions is his time.

To top off this nonsensical program we have, the same committees have to consider legislation which comes their way. The Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration has yet to begin its examination of estimates because there have been two or three bills kicking around. The chairman is in no hurry to get to the examination of estimates. And what is coming? Either an election or May 31, whichever comes first. What is coming is a guillotine. I do not want to operate under the threat of a guillotine when examining estimates.

The general summary shows that total budgetary items amount to precisely \$46,476,469,179. That is almost as good as Loto Canada. In addition to that, total non-budgetary items amount to \$2,255,546,092. That is a total of nearly \$50 billion, and the amount of time available for the examination of estimates is very little. A member must depend upon his own acumen, or that of his researcher, to go digging and to ask for information or detail at a committee meeting because the