

*Private Members' Business*

Environmental information is an area to which this government attaches a great deal of importance. During the process of consulting with Canadians as part of the development of the government's Green Plan, individual Canadians stressed repeatedly that a major priority of the government must be the regular provision and wide dissemination of readily understandable information on the state of the environment and how it is changing.

• (1750)

Canadians told us that they wanted a sound basis to make their own decisions about the environment. They wanted a basis to understand whether the actions they were taking as individuals would help to reduce environmental degradation. They want to be able to judge whether the private sector is doing its part to contribute to a healthy and sustainable environmental legacy for our children. Of course Canadians want to have a basis to make judgments about the environmental performance of their governments.

The routine provision of high quality environmental information will be a major commitment included in the Green Plan when it is made public next week. There is much work to be done in this complex area, but the government is committed to providing Canadians with the information they need to make informed decisions about their own activities and about the environmental performance of others, including governments.

In the view of the government, the measures we have already put in place and are contemplating as part of the Green Plan are, we believe, the best way to ensure that environmental impacts are always considered as part of the government decision-making.

In my view, an environmental auditor general would needlessly duplicate many of the functions which already rest with the Minister of the Environment. Such an institution is simply not an effective substitute for an environmentally aware electorate making fully informed decisions about government performance. This is true

accountability and we are committed to the public as auditors general of our environmental performance.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Côté (Richmond—Wolfe):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to take part in a debate that not only gives hon. members a chance to propose a number of concepts that are praiseworthy, attractive and generous, but also gives other members a chance to respond to the concepts that one of our members, in this case the hon. member for Ottawa West, has presented in the House today. Mr. Speaker, I must admit that the contents of motion M-456 are very interesting and attractive, and I would like to read the motion, and I quote:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of establishing the position of Environmental Auditor General —

I am going to skip some of this, since the focus of our comments is now clear, and the motion goes on to read:

— to ensure that any activity, program or initiative of the government is conducted in a manner that is compatible with a policy of protection and enhancement of the environment.

I repeat, Mr. Speaker, this is a very interesting and attractive approach for anyone who is environmentally aware. The motives underlying this proposal are indeed generous and praiseworthy, and I believe we share those motives as a matter of principle. However, I am not sure it would be appropriate to proceed immediately to discuss establishing a position as novel as that of environmental auditor. I want to demonstrate that it is perhaps premature to develop and establish this kind of responsibility.

I was saying that the purpose of the motion of the hon. member for Ottawa West was to establish the position of Environmental Auditor General, whose main role would consist in monitoring the government's progress in protecting the environment. This is very attractive, I agree, but this concept would merely weaken the government's responsibility in a very important area, because the government already has well defined responsibilities in this respect. Authority is already well established at various levels and reflected in various position.