

Government Orders

Commission. There are many others and probably some of my colleagues will speak about those. I want to talk a little about the National Capital Commission. I want to speak to this from the perspective of a person who lives some distance from Ottawa.

• (1525)

As a matter of fact, until just three or four months before the election I had never been to Ottawa, being way out in the west and never having the financial means to take the huge trip out to the east. I would always have liked to but we were not able to do that within the confines of our family budget. Of course since the election, I have had the privilege of spending a lot of time in Ottawa.

One thing impressed me and that was the tonnes, the truckloads of money Canadians have poured into this region. I suppose there is nothing wrong with saying that this is Canada's national capital. Surely in this part of the country, in this city which houses our capital, we can do some special things to make it good, to make it attractive, to make it a tourist centre, to make it fun for citizens to visit and to see more than just the workings of government.

It is quite evident that after the dog and pony show of question period is over most citizens find this not that interesting. The galleries are mostly empty now and I admire those who are still here listening to this. They come to Ottawa and after question period they want to go and visit some other things.

We have museums, we have parks, we have all sorts of things. However this being the seat of government, by that token it attracts tourists here, other Canadians and indeed people from around the world. Would it not then be reasonable to ask the city of Ottawa to capitalize on that and as every other city in Canada needs to do, have it look after making other attractions in the city that will attract and help entertain the people who come here?

That happens in every city in Canada except this one. This city alone receives this huge input of government money, which translates into taxpayers' money from across the country, in order to provide these nice things. I am not speaking against what is being provided. I am saying that the money ought to be provided in a much more efficient way, managed by private enterprise primarily but also with some involvement by the city itself.

The National Capital Commission is not accountable. It is another one of those places where the taxpayers are being coerced into sending their money to Ottawa. As I said, we send it here in truckloads. At the same time, there are many areas of government where we taxpayers do not have any say on how the money is spent. We can each legitimately ask the question: What value is this expenditure to me as an individual living in a part of

the country away from Ottawa, or indeed what value is it in terms of the country itself?

It is unfortunate that the National Capital Commission has decided to hold all its meetings in camera. When suggested that those meetings should be made public it said: "No, this is the same as any other crown corporation. We are not required to and therefore we will not". I do not think that is acceptable. I know it is not acceptable.

People complain to me about the high level of taxation just about every day. Those people are very upset when their money goes into a black hole, a dark sinkhole somewhere and there is no accountability on how it is spent. We do not know how much is given to certain individuals. We do not know how contracts are let. We do not know whose friends are getting paid what.

Again, it is innuendo that could be so easily solved by just doing what the Liberals said they would do, that is, having open government: openness and accountability. If there is nothing to hide, why would you be afraid of having someone look at what is happening? If you have something to hide then you will hide it. If you simply hide it, then the conclusion on the part of many Canadians is that there must be something to hide.

Right now it is winter. People back in my riding who happen to be watching this are enjoying today, a plus one day, but right here right now we are feeling the brunt of winter. In Ottawa these days, we have a little thing called Winterlude, a wonderful cultural event. Last year it cost just under \$264,000. We are told that it is time to restrain ourselves, to reduce our spending and to look after the mounting debt. What is the response of this unaccountable capital commission with the Winterlude concert? The best information I have is that instead of spending \$264,000, as it did last year, it is spending \$383,000.

• (1530)

I know \$383,000 is not much in terms of total government spending, but when a citizen is having trouble making ends meet and is being asked to pay \$800 or \$900 a month in taxes, seeing one-third of a million dollars being spent here, to him it is a huge amount of money. That lack of accountability is something we need to really address.

I believe we need to look very seriously at disbanding the National Capital Commission. The parts that pertain to the Canadian government could easily be transferred to public works and government services. Yes, we want to keep the grounds nice. We want to keep the buildings in repair. We need to occasionally undertake to build a monument or something like that. It could be done under the aegis of the minister, with accountability to the people via Parliament instead of just being done by an unaccountable, appointed group.