

Supply

• (1855)

I must say that with the co-operation of my colleague, the Deputy Government Whip and member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, we managed first of all to ensure that each member had an office on the Hill. We negotiated with the whips of the other two political parties recognized in this House, we negotiated various budgets including research budgets and budgets for party leaders and House officials, so that by January 17, when the Prime Minister, the government called back the House, we would be ready to go and members would be ready to function and fulfil the mandate they received on October 25 as legislators.

From my very first day as Government Whip, my objective was to reduce operating costs for all parliamentary activities and their administration. We started with the budget for the various caucuses, and after several meetings we managed to save a couple of million dollars, which is quite substantial.

When allocating members' offices, we were determined to keep moving and installation costs to a minimum. In fact, I released the figures several months ago. We managed to save quite a bit of money. We saved about \$1.1 million on moving costs alone here on the Hill. This was a reduction of 87 per cent over what was spent after the 1988 election.

The purpose of this initial operation was to meet the commitments we made during the election campaign. In the red book we said that we wanted to set an example by starting right here. If we tell people they have to tighten their belts, we have to start by tightening our own here in this House. And we did that with our first operation, the allocation of members' offices. We told members and ministers: These are the offices you have been allocated and you take them as is, and if any repairs or improvements are necessary, we will make a report and ensure only the absolute minimum is done. There will be no abuse of the system. And the results are there.

We did not want to stop there. Once all the members were accommodated on the Hill, we started looking at all the expenses, all the privileges, all the things provided to the members. That was the beginning of what people commonly call the Gagliano plan. I am pleased to note today—a few weeks before the summer recess—that the exercise was not just for the media, it was not simply a shopping list that we made as long as possible to take credit for it. We did not say we were going to cut five or six million from the operating budget of the House of Commons just to be able to brag about it afterwards. No, we did it because we believed in it. We did it because it was necessary. There were things which had to be changed, things which were no longer suitable, no longer necessary.

• (1900)

We had two criteria. To save money, naturally, but also to give members services they really needed to do their jobs effectively. We did not cut for the sake of cutting, we analyzed each cut. I must, at this stage, thank the management of this House which provided me with the figures I needed, and put their knowledge and experience at our disposal. Of course, I also had the support of my caucus colleagues. As politicians, we must make choices. With the staff of the House I was able to define options, and then it was simply a matter of deciding which option to implement.

We have only a few weeks left before we adjourn for the summer. Mr. Speaker, we are supposed to adjourn on June 23. I am proud to say that the Gagliano plan, that is the expenditures reduction plan which I announced to all Canadians on January 16 in a press conference, has now been completed. There are still a few points left. This very afternoon, there was a meeting of the sub-committee on internal economy regarding parliamentary associations; a meeting is planned to adopt a plan to make the cafeteria and the restaurant more efficient and to save money. By June 23, my cost control plan will be in place. Some steps were already implemented in February and March.

But, my plan is not part of the estimates we are going to vote on tonight. The savings do not appear in the grand total since, at the time we had to table the estimates for the House of Commons, our plan was not ready, of course, but we still had a deadline to meet, a deadline to cut government expenditures and table the results in the House, which had been set by the President of the Treasury Board.

I am sure that members have had a look at that booklet. The plan is mentioned in there and it will appear in the next estimates, but I want to ensure the House that the savings which were announced are real and that they are possible. Some savings have already been made, and will be carried over year after year. As we said in the red book, we want to be fiscally responsible, and will continue to be so. Mr. Speaker, I will continue. As I said on January 16, in the short time we had between the October 25 election and the opening of the current Parliament on January 17 and despite all the work involved in organizing the situation on the Hill and the offices of all members, we came up with a reduction plan in which we addressed what seemed at the time the most feasible and visible goals we could reach.

We are currently considering other changes. There are more savings to be made. What is important is that we are willing to take our responsibilities and ready to announce and defend our positions. And when you take logical and fair decisions, you can only be confident like I am. I believe this expenditures reduction plan will work, because I have received several letters from