

*Government Orders*

[English]

Since Canadians are both shareholders and customers of the Public Service, I thoroughly endorse and recommend for rapid passage these worthy amendments that I would now like to describe in some detail.

The Treasury Board has had an informal role in the planning and administration of real property management in the Public Service for some time. Amendments proposed would formalize that role.

Several amendments are designed to improve cash management and to modernize the government's payment practices. They are driven by an overriding desire to be fairer to all taxpayers, the majority of whom pay their bills to the government on time.

Among these are provisions to make collection agency fees statutory expenditures, thereby eliminating the current budgetary disincentive faced by managers when using them.

In the case of the minority of Canadians who do not pay their bills to the government within a reasonable time, thereby placing a financial burden on all taxpayers, there are provisions to make regulations to charge interest on overdue accounts and to impose an administrative fee when payment is made by NSF cheques.

There is, throughout, provision to exempt taxpayers from these measures for humanitarian reasons when it is appropriate to do so, including an expanded authority to forgive any debts, not just fees and taxes, where enforcement and collection is considered to be unreasonable or unjust under the circumstances. The issue also arose during debate in this House on Veterans Affairs' overpayments on September 23, 1988.

The forgiveness provisions are important because they would make it possible for the government to recover at least some of the hundreds of millions of dollars that are owed, but which are deemed to be effectively uncollectable, by making it possible in exchange for payment of the principal. This would also extend to all Canadians the same straightforward process that we apply to crown corporations. This proposed change was recommended by the Senate finance committee in its fourteenth report in March 1986.

There are also provisions to permit the making of payments electronically, which is the wave of the future,

and in general to permit more businesslike practices in the interests of all Canadians.

[Translation]

Other amendments are aimed at clarifying and modestly extending *Financial Administration Act* provisions regarding cost recovery and user charges. Among other things, the amendments will facilitate a more consistent and equitable approach to charging across the government.

These amendments would enhance revenue-generation and cost-recovery opportunities from the users of government programs and services, which are important to the government's efforts to improve efficiency and attack the deficit.

Furthermore, the government feels that charging clients a fee for specific services and the use of facilities when there is a clearly identified beneficiary is fairer to all taxpayers. It is also an important means of improving the management and allocation of scarce resources.

[English]

Other provisions of this bill would help certain commercial type government operations to respond in a more businesslike way by adjusting the level of service to meet client demand on a full or at least partially self-financing basis. This would both relieve pressures on the government's operating reserve and support the Public Service 2000 initiative with its clear emphasis on improving service to the public.

I would like to stress that neither the user charging nor the spending of revenue provisions containing these amendments would result in departments suddenly supplementing their appropriations with user fees. Only Parliament may authorize departments to spend revenues they collect. Fees would be prescribed by order and therefore would have to be published in *The Canada Gazette*. In addition, consistent with the government's regulatory process, which provides an opportunity for public input, users would be notified in advance and, where warranted, would be consulted prior to the establishment of fees.

Authority to spend revenues would have to be included in appropriation acts that Parliament would be asked to review and approve. These arrangements facilitate spending of revenues and create revolving funds which would be used only when it is considered that significant managerial improvement would result.