

*Private Members' Business*

and a more open budget process, a bigger role in policy making for members of the House.

• (1425)

These are only some of our shared concerns. In addition, of course, we agreed on the need to review existing programs and policies to ensure they continue to meet the needs of Canadians.

Specifically, the Auditor General has consistently advocated the need for better reporting of financial information for Parliament. This year was no exception. This year Mr. Desautels devoted an entire chapter of the report to his view that better information is required on the debt and deficit.

To address this need the finance department has issued two publications that will help Canadians understand the debt and the deficit. A short booklet entitled "Basic Facts on Spending" summarizes spending as it is presented in the federal budget and public accounts. It will help Canadians better understand the federal government's budgetary spending. In addition, a longer background document called "Federal Spending" provides more detail.

As a member of Parliament it is a matter of personal satisfaction for me that the public accounts for the year ending March 31, 1993 were accepted without reservation by the Auditor General.

Their fundamental purpose is to provide information to Parliament and through Parliament to all Canadians. Their purpose is to facilitate understanding of the full nature and extent of the financial affairs and resources for which the government is responsible.

It is the Auditor General's job to examine them. Last year the Auditor General said that in his view: "The government's financial statements would be more understandable if they were presented in a comprehensive but succinct annual financial report". What Mr. Desautels was calling for was a financial report similar to the annual reports published by corporations in the private sector. The government has done just that. To make the financial statements of the Government of Canada more understandable to the public we added a new section to the 1993 public accounts.

[Translation]

For the first time, we gave a summary of this year's economic developments, a review of our financial situation and a set of consolidated financial statements. The new graphs and organization charts present complex financial data in a way that is easy to understand.

[English]

In his remarks to the Canadian Club, Mr. Desautels specifically lauded the new section in the public accounts which he said included a number of indicators that should help Canadians gain a better appreciation of the government's financial condition. On the same occasion the Auditor General gave the government good marks for beginning the process of improving information about deficits and debt and for opening up the budget process.

This government made great strides in opening the budget process through pre-budget consultations. The Minister of Finance met hundreds of Canadians and heard from them directly what they felt had to be done to turn the economy around and create jobs and to restore Canadians' faith in the future.

In conclusion, I have emphasized the importance of the contribution the Auditor General makes to a better understanding of the issues facing the government. There is no doubt that the Auditor General's work is an important stimulus to constructive action.

However would this stimulus be any greater if Mr. Desautels reported to Parliament several times a year? We have a system now that is working well to the benefit of all Canadians. Would we lose more in coherence, comparability and impact than we would gain? These questions deserve the most careful scrutiny.

**Mr. Gordon Kirkby (Prince Albert—Churchill River):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to address the House on the frequency of reporting by the Auditor General. I would like to compliment the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier for introducing this bill.

All members of the House are aware of the valuable contribution the Auditor General makes every year in improving the way the government spends the taxpayers' money. All of us look forward as do the taxpayers and the media of this country to the annual fall ritual of the tabling of the Auditor General's report.

The Auditor General as an institution in Canada dates back to before Confederation. There was a time in our land when every cheque issued by the government had to be pre-approved by the Auditor General.

• (1430)

The role of the Auditor General has changed considerably since then, as has the way government works. Yet the Auditor General remains the independent watchdog for this House and for the taxpayer. The hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier is right in trying to make sure that the job is well done.

We should keep in mind that the Auditor General does not act in isolation. His work supports and affects that of other institutions and mechanisms in place to guard over the management of government. The financial program management of depart-