

arguments he can muster to convince us that actually if the government made known the long term plans of the various departments, the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce and other departments, that would be beneficial to everybody. I fail to see any such benefit for General Motors or Chrysler as well as other industries which compete against one another and also stand to gain by keeping secret the main elements of their long-term plans.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, he mentioned with felt nostalgia I think the disappearance of a practice that formally existed whereby the committee of the whole examined most bills. Today, as one knows, the committee of the whole is only used for bills from the Department of Finance or others which call for the spending of public monies.

However, the fact still remains that each and everyone of us has the opportunity and advantage, if he wants, to attend, contribute to and participate in the sittings of various committees where, for example, the estimates of every department can be examined. Moreover, after the implementation of projects and programs everyone of us can, if he wants, attend the sittings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and check again on the activities of the various departments.

And so, the mere fact that the committee of the whole is not used to the same extent as previously, and also that long term programs of the various departments are not announced do not jeopardize the interest of Canadians, and Canadians do not miss anything by being unaware of those long term projects.

• (1720)

[English]

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, I take this occasion that is offered to me to speak of the Veterans Affairs Department, for many reasons. As you know, I participate in the debates of the standing committee, and it is a department I have very much at heart. I would like to present some information on the activities of the department.

In accordance with long standing practice, the government's spending proposals are presented to parliament before the commencement of the fiscal year in the form of the estimates' blue book, a document with which hon. members are quite familiar. Hon. members will appreciate that these estimates represent the end product of a great deal of effort by literally thousands of people in all departments and agencies of the government, both in Ottawa and in the many far-flung locations where Canada is represented.

Although the main estimates represent a relatively short-term spending plan, the dynamic nature of Canadian life inevitably gives rise to changes that affect the expenditure proposals contained in the blue book, with the result that supplementary estimates are often required to provide for changes made necessary by the constant search for a better life for all Canadians.

Hon. members will also realize that although the annual estimates present the government's short-term spending proposals, continuous planning is taking place on a longer term basis in an effort not only to anticipate future

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needs but in an ongoing search for new and better ways of achieving objectives and allocating resources. One element in this continuing process is a procedure whereby approximately one year before the main estimates are tabled in parliament each minister puts forward his recommendations for changes in existing programs to improve service, increase efficiency and to meet new demands not currently being met. In the same manner, recommendations for new or substantially changed programs are submitted for consideration by his colleagues.

It is widely and correctly recognized that these various planning documents prepared within departments of the government are of necessity confidential papers. Indeed, I would refer hon. members to *Hansard* for February 28 of this year, at page 1747, when this same subject was briefly discussed arising from one of the notices of motion placed by the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Grier). At that time the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Breau) replied as follows:

Notices of motions for papers Nos. 87 to 114 are internal documents of a confidential nature and therefore cannot be tabled.

This is still the situation as it relates to the notice of motion now being debated. I would reiterate, however, that particulars of approved programs are made public in the form of annual estimates.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is a relatively senior department in terms of age. Few departments, however, have experienced so much change in as short a time as veterans affairs has in the last few years. Only six years ago, in 1967-68, the total expenditures of the department amounted to \$399 million. The published estimates for 1973-74 amount to \$480 million. Furthermore, although the current fiscal year is not yet six months old, it is already forecast that expenditures will exceed \$540 million because of recent measures approved by parliament. That is close to a 40 per cent increase over the last six years.

The substantial change in current spending is due primarily to the passage of two pieces of legislation, Bill C-148, an act to amend the War Veterans Allowance Act which received royal assent on April 5, 1973, and more recently the adoption of Bill C-202, a piece of legislation which is truly a high-water mark in the history of veterans legislation and which resulted in major changes being made to the basis on which the rates of disability pension are determined. This latter bill received royal assent on June 28, 1973, and became effective on July 1.

It has been my privilege to serve as chairman of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs which has the responsibility of examining the estimates and draft legislation respecting the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs is noted for the non-partisan and co-operative manner in which it operates, and I know that hon. members will understand and excuse my pride in having had the opportunity to play a part in bringing about the legislative changes to which I have referred and which have done so much to improve the financial lot of disability pensioners and war veterans allowance recipients.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I would like, if I may, to review briefly the measures adopted during the last few months for the