

[English]

Mrs. Dianne Brushett (Cumberland—Colchester): Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge the member's passion with which he speaks in this debate this morning. He refers to the infrastructure program and is highly critical of the fact that we will not be monitoring and watching it as carefully as we might.

Does the hon. member not have confidence that the municipalities in the province of Quebec can administer these programs and deliver what is best for the citizens of Quebec?

[Translation]

Mr. Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her comment and question. We have every confidence that the municipalities in the province of Quebec will administer their share of the third of this program.

If, as the hon. member pointed out, there is so much passion in my speech, it is because we are dealing with initiatives that eat up billions of dollars and must be examined against the background of an enormous deficit and the absence of any real audit and evaluation programs. A mere 25 per cent of expenditures have been submitted to program evaluation in seven years. This is an indication that we must act and set up a special committee which will be able to examine all expenditures.

Mr. Caron: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the House sit until 1:05 p.m. so that hon. members can ask me questions after my speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): The House has heard the request of the hon. member for Jonquière. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, the motion put forward by the Official Opposition calls for the creation of a special parliamentary committee with a mandate to examine public expenditures by the federal government. These are the expenditures related to the various programs implemented by departments and Crown corporations with billions of taxpayers' dollars.

It is the responsibility of Parliament to determine whether taxpayers' money is being spent wisely. During the last election campaign, the Bloc Québécois argued that a review of public spending was urgently needed. The idea of a special parliamentary committee responsible for this task was extremely well received in my constituency. People want to know. They see around them examples of misspent public funds. They read in the newspapers horror stories on public spending.

Like other Canadians and Quebecers, the people in my constituency are aware that the government does not have much leeway in financial matters and they know that we must contemplate drastic cuts in spending.

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While taxpayers want the federal government to cut spending, they are opposed to hasty, systematic, arbitrary cuts that may have disastrous consequences, especially for the poorest in our society.

Parliament, being responsible for the public purse, must screen public expenditures. Some are essential, others necessary, many undoubtedly useful, but some are unnecessary in today's context and must be eliminated.

The proposed committee could be responsible for this analysis of expenditures and report to Parliament, who would then be able to set objectives to reduce spending and justify these objectives to the people affected by the cuts.

• (1255)

This is an emergency measure because the situation requires it. The present procedures and control methods have been shown to be ineffective. Those who claim that this duplicates the Public Accounts Committee are mistaken. The mandate of the proposed committee is broader and, given the situation, it is almost a public salvation committee which could force managers to open their books and even go so far as to suggest a restructuring of public spending in Canada.

The mandate of the committee which we propose would be to review all spending related to government programs. The Auditor General's latest report gives us many examples of programs that could be examined.

As an illustration, see what the auditor concluded after examining the Canadian aboriginal economic development strategy program, for which the government has spent not less than \$900 million since 1989. I am interested in this program because I am a member of the Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

This program was run by three departments: Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Employment and Immigration, and Industry, Science and Technology. The overall purpose of the program was to reduce economic disparities between native people and other Canadians and Quebecers, a laudable goal which no one can criticize. The aim was to help native communities become economically self-sufficient. If you know the social and economic situation of native people, you will agree that it is urgent. We must act so that there are no more Davis Inlets in Canada.

Was this highly laudable goal reached? No one can say, according to the Auditor General. The three departments could not show that the funding methods used and the amounts allocated were appropriate. The departments concerned could not prove that they met the goals of the strategy.

In short, after spending \$900 million, Parliament does not know if the employment rate and income have increased among native people, if a reasonable number of new businesses were started, if the native people are less dependent on welfare. Nor does Parliament know if native communities are better able to