

Auditor General Act

results of the government's own evaluation techniques both within government and to parliament. The difference in wording between subsections (d) and (e) of paragraph 7(2) emphasize the qualitative difference between the concepts of "economy" and "efficiency" which are susceptible to objective measurement, and that of "effectiveness" whose measurement is essentially a matter of judgment.

● (1740)

Bill C-20 requires the auditor general to comment on the absence of effectiveness measurement procedures where he feels that they could be of benefit, but clearly excludes the auditor general from conducting effective audits himself and thus becoming involved in judgemental decisions which are, by their very nature, political in character. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the government programs is a constitutional responsibility of parliament itself, and the wording of the bill protects the office of the auditor general from any danger of being drawn into political debate.

Everyone is concerned about the need for procedures which may be used to ensure that federal government programs are managed economically and efficiently and that they are effective in meeting the stated requirements of government policies. The underlying intent of sections 7(2)(d) and (e) of Bill C-20 is to require the auditor general to comment on uneconomical and inefficient practices, and furthermore to comment on any absence of effective evaluation procedures, including reporting mechanisms, where he feels that such procedures could be beneficially applied.

Mr. Speaker, Bill C-20 is a good piece of legislation that should go a long way toward alleviating the anxieties of the public who are naturally concerned about the manner in which their taxes are spent. I can now unreservedly support the passing of Bill C-20, an act respecting the office of the auditor general.

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, administration of finances is the pivot on which management of a household, a business, a hobby, recreation, or any function progresses or fails, depending on the desire and capability of the person or persons handling the funds. When the operation is strictly personal or a private venture, the impact is perhaps not serious—at least, the amount involved is small. When we come to the issue of government financial administration, the picture is entirely different: we are involved in the trustworthiness of government, which operates solely on the taxes it levies on the population of this country, a matter of grave importance, and huge amounts.

It is all very well to say the federal government is doing the job efficiently simply because we have an auditor general, but his authority comes into effect after the funds have been spent. Therefore, regardless of the degree of authority he has, he is placed in an unenviable situation. The auditor of government books must try to ensure the general public that their money has been used sensibly and that adequate value was received, but he does not have an opportunity of limiting the amount paid, or checking on what was received, until long afterward.

[Mr. Herbert.]

At best, his scrutiny, diligence and findings can affect government operations in the ensuing year or in the future.

The auditor general is the individual our taxpayers rely on to restore common sense so that government spending will be controlled. The auditor general has said the finances of this government are practically out of control. What has the government done to correct such careless disregard of money which does not belong to it to squander? I am not aware of any serious intent or action on the part of the government to cut back or to curtail spending to legitimate projects, although I have heard and read many cabinet ministers boast of their restrictions. Perhaps they have succeeded in convincing some taxpayers that their efforts are sincere and the results positive, but those who are aware of this year's \$7 billion budget deficit must have doubts.

The auditor general does not, of course, participate in the preparation of the federal budget, but he should have authority to ensure that every dollar is accounted for precisely, that it had to be spent, and that full value was returned. If he cannot inform the general public of what is taking place behind the scenes of government finances, who will?

When I speak of government, I do not exclude the operations of parliament itself, over which the auditor general does not have any say, before or after. Criticism was levelled at parliament by the news media when it became known that House of Commons' staff positions totalled 2,554 last year and now number 2,746, averaging more than ten for each member of parliament. One must not overlook the related expenditures, regardless of where the staff is located—furniture, equipment, stationery, salaries, etc. Only members of parliament, all elected representatives, can exercise restraint as far as this House is concerned. Everyone could and should do so, thereby setting an example. Somebody must start the ball of restraint moving in the right direction, and in my opinion Parliament Hill is the place to start the game.

Mr. Speaker, are Canadians better served by this out of control hoist in the cost of operating the House of Commons? Is it fair to criticize this government, or any level of government, for overspending or overgoverning if we are following the same trend like a flock of sheep moving to greener pastures? I realize that everyone in this House is responsible to his or her electors, but I doubt that any voter would criticize an elected representative for exercising restraint and explaining why and how this was accomplished. Every worthy cause or deed has a beginning, and that beginning could be small. Its size at the onset is not important, but how it grows in the right direction is. Would it not be far better to be admired for good management and sensible use of taxpayer dollars than to do something just because others are? Why not be different? Why not restrict spending right here on Parliament Hill where the laws are enacted?

Yesterday, the hon. member for Leeds (Mr. Cossitt) drew attention to a dangerous statement of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) when attending the recent Commonwealth Conference where he said there is such a thing as one-party democracy, a form of government with which he apparently agrees. If