

*Financial Organization and Accountability*

examine them and ventilate grievances; and by compelling the government and its officials to tell the whole truth about spending?

● (1550)

**Mr. Andras:** Mr. Speaker, I think this goes back to your ruling on a question the other day. I am not going to drag Your Honour into this, but much of the question the hon. member has put to me really falls within parliament's own prerogatives and within the procedures of this House with regard to the examination of estimates, and so on. That is fair game. But hon. members should not look to me as the minister to make that change. That is a parliamentary decision.

As to information and the form of estimates, I think hon. members will have noted, if they have had the opportunity—and if not, I invite them to read the progress report I tabled in this House on Friday, which clearly indicates that we wish to improve the form of estimates and the information accompanying the estimates—that it is all for the purpose of better and more enlightened examination by hon. member under the procedures of the House. We have developed a guide, in draft form, which we will place before the public accounts committee at the earliest possible opportunity for its examination before it goes any further in terms of becoming a formal commitment, and it is with respect to honouring a commitment that I understand has been made to the public accounts committee.

So on the one hand I think procedures are another matter, but on the other hand I am saying that we are committed to proceeding down that path and we are following exactly the line the public accounts committee requested us to follow in placing the guide before the committee before finalizing it.

**Mr. Lawrence:** Mr. Speaker, I fully appreciate that at this time hon. members can only ask questions. I do so, not in the guise of being a private member of the opposition but, rather, as a disappointed chairman of what I consider to be the most important standing committee of this House. Until now that committee has been quite non-partisan and impartial. I refer to the public accounts committee.

I realize that I can only ask questions and that I cannot make points, but my first question to the minister has to be: Why today? The government has had the Auditor General's report in its hands since last Friday. It has been no secret at all that the government had made up its mind to table that report today.

In his statement today—of which I had no advance copy and no knowledge of the announcement at all—the minister indicated that the Auditor General had had conferences with the minister and with at least one other of his cabinet colleagues months ago respecting the implementation of the recommendations in his last year's report. I must be honest with the House and with the minister when I say that the full implication has to be that the government and the minister are trying to steal the thunder of the Auditor General. There can be no other implication. The government knew about these

[Mr. Baldwin.]

things. It looks like a one-upmanship, PR move, and I would ask the minister: Why today? That is question number one. Is it merely a coincidence that today is the day the Auditor General—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member has put his question rather clearly.

**Mr. Lawrence:** May I continue with two other questions, while I am at it, and perhaps when the minister is on his feet he can answer all of them?

**Mr. Speaker:** It would probably be just as easy to have the hon. member put all three of his questions at once.

**Mr. Lawrence:** The second question is this: As the minister knows, and as I hope the House knows, late last week we reconstituted the public accounts committee. The committee has a new chairman. There already have been changes in the procedures and methods of that committee. My hope had been that as time went on there would be further changes in that committee, as far as methodology was concerned, with regard to tackling any alleged waste or inefficiency in government as well as looking at the public accounts and the Auditor General's report. I am really disappointed in this move today.

**An hon. Member:** Order.

**Mr. Lawrence:** Does the minister feel that setting up a royal commission can, in any way or will, restrict the operations of the public accounts committee? Are we on a parallel course? If we call witnesses and the royal commission has to call exactly the same witnesses, who is paramount in this? Is this not a blow against the supremacy of a standing committee of the House of Commons?

My final question to the minister is simply this: As I understand it, the standing committee is there to look for inefficiency in the administration of the government, and to look for waste in government expenditures. If the public accounts committee is to do its job in a worthwhile manner, what would the minister think if we said we considered setting up this royal commission a gross waste of government expenditure?

**Mr. Andras:** Mr. Speaker, the first question was: Why today? I think that is a legitimate question. First, I think the implication of the hon. member's comment is that this is some kind of dodge or insult to the Auditor General. I absolutely dismiss that. We share his concern about the need, post-Glassco and following the massive decentralization which took place in implementing the Glassco recommendations, somehow to get the pendulum back. It should not go back to where it was pre-Glassco, because I think the government would collapse, because of the complexities involved, if every request for a pencil or a paper-clip had to be approved by the president of the treasury board. With this, I think hon. members would agree. Goodness knows, we get accused now of slowness and red-tape and we have felt real concern. As candidly as I can, I am trying to express my concern in response to the question