

There have been many examples of such partnerships, honourable senators. For instance, the Canada Council of Forest Ministers has recently agreed to a framework for future cooperation in areas of science and technology, international trade issues, regional development, aboriginal forestry and national coordination. Another example of successful partnership has been in the field of geomatics. Under the five-year, \$16-million Geographic Information Technology Development program, the federal and provincial governments have shared equally in the cost of acquiring digital mapping data. This program, which was instituted by Geomatics Canada, has been so successful that it has now been extended and expanded to include partnerships with utilities in the private sector. In the mining sector, the Whitehorse Mining Initiative Leadership Accord was signed recently in Victoria. This accord sets out principles and goals to assist all interested parties in their efforts to ensure a prosperous mining industry that is committed to sustainable development.

Honourable senators, Bill C-48 makes explicit reference to the minister's duty to foster the sustainable development of Canada's energy, mineral and forest resources. This means that the government's economic, social and environmental objectives will be factored into all decisions about resource development, management and use.

• (1500)

One way that the department will pursue sustainable development is through the work of its scientific branches. Natural Resources Canada will continue to have the science and technology arms through the Canadian Forest Service, the Geological Survey of Canada, the Canada Centre for Mineral Energy and Technology, and Geomatics Canada.

In the energy area, the department is working closely with the provinces and other groups to develop a national action program that achieves Canada's goals with respect to climate change. In addition, a major responsibility of the new department is to promote energy efficiency as a means of limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally, honourable senators, Bill C-48 is a housekeeping bill that combines two separate departments. The bill emphasizes cooperation with the provinces that own the natural resources so Canadians can obtain maximum benefits in the future.

Hon. Eric Arthur Berntson (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, it is my intention today to speak to several pieces of legislation at the same time in the interests of efficiency and brevity. These are bills that are either before us or will be brought before us dealing with reorganization of government. Some of them can be expected at any time, and they all deal with reorganization, in one way or another, with various departments.

You will notice that I said "reorganization of government" and not specifically "this government". That is because in reality what we are debating here today is an initiative begun by the previous Progressive Conservative government, and shamelessly adopted with some adjustments and implemented by this Liberal government.

The bills are: Bill C-46, to establish the Department of Industry, Bill C-48, to establish the Department of Natural Resources, Bill C-52, to establish the Department of Public Works and Government Services. That last one we are watching very carefully because there are some provisions in it that essentially deal with privatizing and allowing certain components of this department to compete with the private sector. If it arrives here in its present form, you may be assured that it will not receive a smooth ride. As well, we can expect Bill C-53, to establish the Department of Canadian Heritage.

These four bills, honourable senators, plus two other bills, Bill C-49, to establish the Department of Agriculture and Agri-food, and Bill C-35, to establish the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, which have already passed through this chamber, make up the enabling legislation required to accommodate a restructuring of the various ministries and government departments.

Honourable senators, while I will not dwell at length on the issue of dropping the requirement for these departments to report on an annual basis to Parliament, it will be raised in the committees dealing with these reorganization bills. It is rather curious that this would happen. Members of both houses are interested in knowing why that provision is not there. Previously, these departments reported on an annual basis to Parliament. In the case of the bill before us, the provision is not dropped completely, but it becomes a discretionary matter for the minister.

Honourable senators, it is important to put into perspective today what exactly we are being asked to do in passing these pieces of legislation.

On June 25, 1993, then Prime Minister Kim Campbell ushered in what was to be recorded as an historic reorganization in the way the federal government operated in this country. At the time, the Prime Minister said that it:

...represents a first step toward providing Canadians with a leaner, more accessible and more efficient government to meet the challenges facing Canada over the balance of the decade and into the 21st century.

The key changes announced in June 1993 included a reduction in the number of cabinet posts from 35 to 25 — 10 positions were eliminated, including all "Minister of State" positions. This brought the size of the federal cabinet to its lowest level since 1963.

With a smaller cabinet, the cabinet decision-making process could be streamlined. Six cabinet committees were eliminated, including the Priorities and Planning Committee. The Progressive Conservative government's efforts at restructuring did not stop there. They took aim at the size and complexity of the bureaucracy, and by merging and redesigning several government departments, the total number was reduced from 32 to 23. Eight departments were created or fundamentally redesigned, three received new mandates, and another 15 were merged or broken up. No department was spared this streamlining exercise.