

Oral Questions

Defence will be co-operating with him and with any investigation done by the auditor general on these contracts.

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AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

Yesterday's auditor general report stated that even the best codes of conduct or conflict of interest guidelines could not protect Canadians from a government that was not fundamentally honest. The report made clear that we could not expect ethical behaviour from public servants if we do not have it from their leadership, the cabinet.

After appointing an ethics counsellor that is completely beholden to the office so that he will forever be able to hide all ethics scandals, how could the Prime Minister expect his public servants to behave ethically even when they know they cannot get caught?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in addition to all of what I enunciated yesterday in terms of the high level of ethical standards that the government espouses and that the public service carries out, my colleague, the House leader, put before the House a proposition for a special joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on a code of conduct.

I understand the difficulty is that the members opposite in the Reform Party are filibustering the attempt to set it up. If they would get behind this effort we could even go an extra step. We already have the ethics counsellor, the code of employment and conflict of interest. We have already changed the Lobbyists Registration Act. We have already changed the certification of lobbyists with respect to contracts. We have done a great deal. I think the auditor general recognized that in his report.

There is always room for more improvement and we will carry out more improvement. A lot has been done. Let them come on side in terms of getting through the proposition the House leader has put before us on a code of conduct.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, there is a great difference between filibustering and promoting a logical solution to a problem. We want the ethics counsellor to be independent. That was my question; that is what I was talking about. That is why my question is again directed to the Deputy Prime Minister.

We noticed that in the last few days no one has questioned the authenticity of the report of the auditor general. No one questions his findings as being inaccurate. No one questions that he

is not thorough. We all find him trustworthy and believable. Why? It is because he is independent. That is the reason.

• (1140)

I ask again, again and again until finally I hope the logic gets through: When will we have the assurance that the ethics counsellor will enjoy the same independence as the auditor general has? That is what we are asking and we want an answer to that.

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear this praise for the auditor general because we accept his report. I think his report has given some very useful suggestions.

He has pointed out that when it comes to our public service, when it comes to our government, we take a back seat to nobody when it comes to the ethical standards that are practised by the government and its public service. It is comparable very favourably, as he pointed out, to other governments and to the private sector.

The amendments that they apparently want to the motion that my colleague, the House leader, has put before us are to exempt a whole body from any kind of code of conduct. The other House I believe is the proper phrase. I think it is time they showed some good faith in trying to get the matter through so that we can further deal with the matter of ethics.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Daviault (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment, and I add that this is not our first question on the environment.

Yesterday, the Auditor General of Canada painted a very sorry picture of the federal government's management of dangerous waste. The government has reallocated over a third of the budget of \$150 million intended for pollution management. It has dumped 24 highly contaminated sites onto the provinces. The minister may well speak of orphan sites, but the provinces will be the ones ending up with them. Furthermore, the federal government has provided for no additional funds to clean up the contaminated federal sites that remain.

How does the Minister of the Environment explain that, for lack of new agreements, she in fact unilaterally dumped total responsibility for 24 highly contaminated sites onto the shoulders of the provinces, when human health and the environment are at risk, according to the auditor general.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, funding for the Green Plan was extended at the request of the provinces, which asked for more time to clean up.