

Supply

If the House gives its consent, I propose to move concurrence in the report immediately. In view of the length of the report, I would ask that we dispense with the reading of the report.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, I move that the third report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—GOVERNMENT SPENDING

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal): Mr. Speaker, last year, this government campaigned in favour of greater control of public expenditures. That is to say that we deeply share the concerns before the House today. Too many people, across the country, believe that our present fiscal woes are caused only by indiscriminate spending on the part of too many civil servants who have nothing better to do than to waste taxpayers' money.

It is indeed the underlying feeling which prompted the present debate. This debate is aimed at striking a special committee of the House with a mandate to examine public expenditures, in light of the report of the Auditor General of Canada, and overlap between federal and provincial government programs. Such a committee is already in existence. It is called the House Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Moreover, I will remind the members that each standing committee of the House has the right to examine the expenditures of the department it reviews. To establish a new committee to assess this government's management would duplicate the work already done through other mechanisms at our disposal for our job as public fund watchdogs.

On this side of the House, we think that what Canadians need instead is fundamental reforms that would go much further. This government promised it would keep its promises. If, today, we were to eliminate all the civil service positions across the country, and at the same time their operating budgets and all of their benefits, the government would only save \$19 billion this year. The deficit for this year would still be around \$25 billion.

Therefore, those who tell people that this is the way to get rid of the deficit are not telling the whole truth. The only way to solve this problem is to conduct an in-depth review of the roles and responsibilities of the federal machinery with a view to giving this country a government able to meet the challenges of the next century. That is what we committed ourselves to doing during the election campaign and in the red book, and that is I took the jump into politics.

[English]

Canadians have high expectations of the House. They are demanding that all their levels of government work together to better serve the interests of citizens and taxpayers.

Over the years governments in Canada have lost this client centred focus. Collectively they have promised more than they could deliver and delivered more than they could afford. Programs and services have often been poorly co-ordinated and public services have been used inefficiently. Inefficiency is a luxury that no government can afford any more.

• (1515)

Too often in the past intergovernmental debate has been characterized by acrimony, entrenched positions and grandstanding. Relations between Canadians and their governments have become cumbersome and confusing.

We were elected to effect change. We will respond to the demands of Canadians for client centred government.

[Translation]

In future, reforms will mean that a person coming to a federal civil servant will be evaluated, and served according to his or her needs.

[English]

In the speech from the throne we committed ourselves to work vigorously to ensure that federalism meets the needs of Canadians by clarifying the federal government's responsibilities in relation to other orders of government. This is the way to eliminate overlap and duplication and to find better ways of providing services that represent the best value for taxpayers' dollars and respond to the real needs of Canadians.

We intend to work in partnership with the provinces to refocus government programs and services. We want to provide public services that do not work at cross purposes. We want to get beyond the kind of relationship that is built on obstinacy and narrow mindedness. We want to find a new equilibrium in which the roles and responsibilities of each level of government are more sensibly and reasonably aligned with their competence and financial and human resources.

Our first ministers at their December 21 meeting made a commitment to co-operatively eliminate overlap and duplication. The Prime Minister has given me the responsibility of working with other orders of government to help improve the climate of federal-provincial relations. Our goal is to build a