

Auditor General Act

of all parties not only because he believed that this proposal was a good one, that it would make Canadian public administration much more effective, but also because he felt it would bring an added measure of efficiency to administration as well as greater transparency, through a regular audit of public accounts and expenditures.

In his comments in June 1984, he stated that there was agreement, that the then Liberal Government and the Opposition parties were of one mind on the issue. Unfortunately, an election was called and we know what happened. The Conservative Government that was elected put this proposal aside, and judging by the comments I have heard from Conservative Members on Bills C-250 and C-262, for instance, it seems they think it would be a terrible thing to ask, demand, or allow the Auditor General to table more than one report per year.

As we know, he must table his report before January 31. Custom has it that when the annual report of the Auditor General is published, members of the media study this quite lengthy document carefully, and look for flaws, flagrant examples of unwarranted expenses, and perhaps even stupid expenditures the Government might have indulged in. It is the Auditor General's role to raise them, to direct public attention to them, and to make appropriate recommendations to have these administrative wrinkles ironed out quickly.

As it happens, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General himself is in favour of this proposal. He feels it would allow him to cut the period up, so to speak, so that instead of having to wait one year, sometimes even two, to read the report on the previous years' activities, we could, in a business-like way and on a regular basis, obtain periodic reports on current issues, major projects, on the administration of federal affairs generally, which to my way of thinking seems like an entirely sensible and reasonable way of doing things.

And I would like to say to the Member for Prince-Albert that I am very impressed by his tenacity and persistence in trying to get this government to understand ordinary common sense.

The fact remains that it is hard to get this Government to move. They always wait for someone else to get the ball rolling. One has only to look at the major questions. Today is July 18, and some major issues have been dragged out for three or four years.

It takes time, but I encourage the Member to continue to be persistent. Perhaps one day the light will dawn on the Conservative dark ages and they will see the simple wisdom of allowing the Auditor General to make regular reports, without abusing the process, with all due respect to the Member for Cape Breton Highlands—Canso, because I do not think that the Auditor General would abuse it; he could then submit regular reports to the House, reports that would help to improve the administration of the country, that would make public servants accountable to the Canadian public, that would be conducive to the openness and transparency we and public

opinion are seeking in order to ensure that each tax dollar that is spent is well spent on serious pursuits.

Mr. Speaker, I don't have much more to add except to say to those who are listening that they must read the speeches that were made on Bills C-250 and C-262 to see clearly and realize that this is not a bad idea. It is a very good idea. All we need is some good will and a little action.

In conclusion, I will be supporting this measure, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Mr. Joe Reid (St. Catharines): Mr. Speaker, I too express appreciation for the opportunity to make a few comments on the proposal put forward by the Hon. Member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo). I appreciate his sincerity in this matter coming as he does from the Province of Saskatchewan, my native province, and for pointing out that it has been a number of years since he first introduced this proposal.

He does so out of extensive discussions that have taken place over the past number of years before the Public Accounts Committee with respect to the timing of those reports coming forward as they do from the Auditor General. During those discussions very often the topic for consideration by the Standing Committee was dated, the mistakes had been done and corrected, the past performance had been such and remedied. What was left for the committee to do?

Its actions were rather limited. It appears logical, then, that permitting an Auditor General to bring forward a report as often as he or she chose, other than the annual report, would be appropriate. It would render more accountability to the process.

As has already been mentioned, Section 8(1) of the Auditor General Act gives all the powers and authorities to the Auditor General to act as immediately or as promptly as the person in that office chooses to do.

The Hon. Member who spoke just before me referred to "as often as necessary", as stated in the explanation clause in the Bill being proposed. Are those words any different from the existing clause which states that the Auditor General may make a special report to the House of Commons on any matter of pressing importance or urgency that, in his opinion, should not be deferred until the presentation of his annual report? Does this not give him the authority to present a report as soon as he or she considers it necessary?

I want to bring a number of other factors to the attention of Hon. Members of the House which must be taken into consideration as well. I refer to the initiatives taken by the Government to reduce the number of problems that have come before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. One of the most important initiatives arose out of the great work done by the former Hon. Member for St. John's East through the establishment of a special committee of the House of Commons charged with the responsibility of examining the powers,