

Will these proposed committees report to Parliament, and what is the plan with respect to their responsibilities? Are they going to be reporting back to Parliament?

Senator Perrault: I would be pleased to bring a report to the Senate on this subject. I can say that representations have been made with respect to having certain senators participate in these task forces. I know it is an initiative that would be supported by the Leader of the Opposition. I would be pleased to bring to the Senate a statement about the length, duration, nature and terms of reference of these task forces. I believe it is of importance to us, and certainly it will be reported here as soon as possible.

Senator Roblin: I thank my honourable friend. I would appreciate that action on his part. I raised the question with respect to the reporting procedure because there has been a report circulating that these committees would not be reporting to Parliament but would, in fact, be reporting to the government, which is something quite different.

Speaking for myself, I would certainly like to reserve my position. If it is found, on analysis, that the report is not to be made to Parliament but to the government, that would mean two quite different things and it would certainly affect my attitude with regard to serving on such a committee.

Senator Perrault: I quite understand the honourable senator's position. He has made a good point. That information will be obtained and hopefully we can have a report on it tomorrow afternoon. It should not be a difficult question to answer.

Senator Flynn: For once.

THE ESTIMATES

TABLING OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Hon. Richard A. Donahoe: Honourable senators, my question is directed to the Leader of the Government. A few moments ago the Leader of the Opposition directed a question to the Leader of the Government in which he asked whether certain bills were coming forward for consideration. We were told that we had to wait for those bills until adequate background information was supplied.

Senator Perrault: And the committees brought into being, yes.

Senator Donahoe: Having heard that explanation and the reply, I assume that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and what is good practice in this house is also good practice in the other place. So I am inspired to ask the following question: In the light of the very sparse information that was supplied with the estimates brought down in the other place yesterday, can the Leader of the Government in the Senate tell us whether he knows if it is the government's intention to table more detailed background papers to the estimates?

● (1430)

In particular, can he tell us if it is the government's intention to table five-year revenue and expenditure forecasts such as those which accompanied the Crosbie budget?

Before the answer is given to my question, I should like to point out to the Leader of the Government that it was only last week that the Auditor General of this country said that in his opinion too often incomplete and sometimes incomprehensible spending figures are presented to Parliament. In the light of that criticism and in the light of the paucity of the information provided with the estimates, can we now be told whether we can expect these further five-year revenue and expenditure forecasts to be provided with the estimates?

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault (Leader of the Government): May I, honourable senator, attempt to answer this question in a general fashion, and then I would like to defer to my colleague, Senator Olson, who is deeply concerned with the economic policies of this government.

Senator Smith (Colchester): He always says he isn't.

Senator Perrault: First, this government has spelled out very clearly its intention to provide more information with respect to government programs and many other aspects of government operations. Secondly, when one makes reference to the recent report of the Auditor General, one should bear in mind that his remarks were directed in large part to the activities of the government that was removed from office on February 18.

Hon. Senators: Oh, oh.

Senator Perrault: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition should think carefully about the remarks of the Auditor General as they relate to some of the activities of his own party when in power.

May I point out also, with regard to the suggestion that somehow the government is reluctant to come forward with legislation and proposals for the future, that the predecessor government refused to call Parliament for five months—150 days of inaction—which is hardly exemplary conduct in our parliamentary system.

Hon. Jacques Flynn (Leader of the Opposition): I rise, honourable senators, on a question of privilege. The Leader of the Government has said two things that he should correct. He said in the first place that the report of the Auditor General referred to the previous government.

Senator Perrault: Well, part of it.

Senator Flynn: I would want this to be on the record, that it is now only a part of the report that is referred to. I would also like the leader to identify what part of it does apply to the previous administration.

In the second place, when the Leader of the Government refers to the time we waited to call Parliament, I would ask him how long the official opposition, combined with the socialists, gave us to introduce the program that we had elaborated