

Government Orders

of the position and would allow fresh new ideas to be injected into the position on a regular basis.

There is nothing in the bill which addresses the recommendation that the commissioner be paid a salary equivalent to that of a judge of the supreme court. However, the salary of course is based on the role and mandate of an independent, effective position. Given the measly powers and responsibilities of the position, such a salary clearly is not warranted.

There is nothing in the bill that subjects the commissioner's office to a parliamentary review. The committee recommended that the office be subject to a review every five years by Parliament. This would allow members of Parliament to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of the position. It is clearly evident that the minister has failed to carry through on this recommendation in her bill. Such a clause could be contained in the bill to ensure accountability. If the role is not effective or necessary after five years a new government may wish to review and reconsider the position. I suggest the government consider this.

The red book also promised that the environmental auditor general would have "powers of investigation similar to the powers of the auditor general". Yet in this bill the responsibility for reporting on environmental issues remains with the auditor general, not with a new body. The only powers of investigation that the new commissioner on the environment will have in the proposed legislation will be those designated by his boss.

The government is backtracking on another red book promise. Obviously, as assistant to the auditor general the commissioner of the environment does not have the same powers as his boss to whom he reports. Whether issues are reported through the auditor general or the auditor general's assistant, the commissioner of the environment, it is still up to the auditor general to decide whether action will be taken.

The government is not bound to any of the recommendations of the auditor general nor is it required to make a formal response to the auditor general's report. As a result—and we are well aware of this—many recommendations in the auditor general's reports have been ignored for years by governments which would rather not recognize the problems or act on the solutions.

The Liberal red book criticized the Conservatives for their lack of action in the area of environmental assessment, yet this government refuses to conduct a full environmental assessment of critical environmental hot spots such as the Sydney tar ponds in Nova Scotia. It appears the gap between rhetoric and action is as evident with the Liberals as it was with the Conservatives.

• (1320)

The Minister of the Environment has complained that she cannot perform her job without public pressure. Why then does the minister not create a real position for the commissioner of the environment with powers to put some pressure on her department which she is having so much difficulty handling?

The standing committee proposed to create a separate, independent office of the commissioner of the environment that would have real powers and would be responsible to report directly to the House. The legislation fails to meet the fundamental goals of the standing committee and of the Liberal red book of election promises.

It is high time the government came clean on its election promises. The changes proposed in Bill C-83 to amend the Auditor General Act are simply cosmetic. It is all just a big show from the Liberals in an attempt to fool the public into thinking they are actually doing something when clearly they are not. The bill is nothing but fluff. It accomplishes little.

The government made a number of promises to Canadians. It is becoming very apparent that it cannot or has no intention of keeping promises such as establishing this position. It is time the government came clean on its agenda. If government is going to encourage others to clean up their act, it is time it started putting its own house in order.

From the failure of the government to establish a real environmental auditor general, or a real ethics commissioner for that matter, to the failure of individual members across the way to resist the draw of the pension trough, the picture is clear: the government has no intention of keeping many of its promises to the people of Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): We will now move to the next stage of debate where members will be entitled to a maximum of 20 minutes in their interventions subject to a 10-minute question or comment period.

[Translation]

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to begin with, I would comment very briefly on a remark by the hon. member for Laurentides, who, when speaking on behalf of the official opposition, accused the minister of partisan politics. I could not help noting the irony of her remark in a debate on an environment bill when she talked about the Quebec referendum and the Ogilvie mills, of her lengthy remarks concerning the *Irving Whale* and of course of the usual litany on centralizing federalism with all its sins and evils.

Even more ironically, while accusing the minister of partisan politics, she herself admitted that the minister chose the option put forward by the Bloc Québécois as the official minority, rather than the option put forward by the Liberal majority.