

There has been work done in trying to develop an accountability process that Canadians and parliamentarians can understand. Looking at the estimates and the Public Accounts, volumes of material are available. All of it is there, if you can find it. However, I defy most Canadians to ever try to get to the bottom of it, even in following one very focused line of thought. It is very complex. It is very difficult.

Surely with the electronic and information technology available now we should be able to deal in the accountability process in a very transparent way. Tell Canadians what is going on. That process of accountability has to be relevant. It has to be reliable. It has to be understandable. It has to be consistent. If we set those goals and we set our objectives and if we do not meet them, we have to tell the Canadian people why.

For example if there is a spending program in Canada and there is a huge crisis in the west for grain farmers and it throws everything off the track, I think Canadians understand that, but they want to be told: "This is why we are not meeting our deficit objectives. This is why we cannot do what we said we would do. It is because we are taking care of the farmers". Or it could be the Atlantic fishermen or a major crisis in the automotive industry which changes the picture.

In order to do that, it is going to take a lot of co-operation in this place. When we talk about accountability, we are going to have to talk about how we reform this place. How MPs participate in the process and the kind of input we have in preparing the spending plans as opposed to dealing with historical facts when we come back on Public Accounts.

When the estimates are deemed to have been passed tonight anyway no matter how much we talk here today, does anybody really think we could move an amendment to change one penny in the spending plans of government?

We may have to create a hybrid system from the traditional British parliamentary system of democracy and the systems in the United States and other jurisdictions, but surely we have a responsibility to move in that direction. This would demonstrate to Canadians that we are serious about trying to get our house in order and

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that we are going to share the information. That is essential if Canadians are going to understand what we are trying to achieve.

• (1620)

Part of that process we have to deal with and that I want to raise in this discussion of the estimates today is that traditionally we have had Auditors General report on the spending of government and deal with the accountability process.

The processes in various departments are checked to see if the job is being done properly. Much of that is historic. It is long after the fact. It is after the accountants and the specialists in the Auditor General's office have gone into departments. Then a report is produced, usually in October or November of each year.

I know my following recommendation is going to mean amendments to clarify existing legislation. However it seems to be the kind of thing Canadians would agree with. In other jurisdictions, the Auditor General reports on a timely, periodic basis. In other words when the Auditor General finds out what is going on in a specific area and has concerns and observations to make, that information should be tabled. Then parliamentarians and Canadians would regularly find out exactly what is going on with the expenditure of taxpayers' money.

In Britain there are some 40 reports a year by the Auditor General and Comptroller General. The office over there is combined. It is not a question of saying to the government 40 times a year: "Well, we have got you". Generally speaking, the fact the information is brought forward regularly rather than for political partisan reasons does result in better administration of the public money. On a regular basis, far more quickly than what occurs in Canada now, British parliamentarians and the British people are made aware of problems discovered by the Auditor General.

We believe that Canadians understand the debt and the deficit in terms of the challenge it presents and that it is a serious problem. Overwhelming debt and huge continuing deficits will destroy any future this country might have. Members, whether they are Liberals, Conservatives, NDP, Reform or Bloc Quebecois will have to deal with that reality.