

Routine Proceedings

I noticed that the hon. member suggested to the House how the question of pension funds should be handled. I must tell him that we should use the method recommended by the Auditor General. I must say I find it interesting that every government member who has spoken has changed the subject. The subject today is public accounts and the report concerning the dismantling of the evaluation committee of the most important department in Canada, the department that handles billions, not millions, but billions of dollars. It is the same department that is often, if not always, driving our nation to bankruptcy. I would suggest that the hon. member stick to the subject, unless he has problems with that.

For the hon. member's information, I would like to read a summary of the committee's recommendations.

—The Committee recommends that Senior officials from Revenue Canada be invited to participate on the Advisory Committee, in order to have some influence on it, and asks that it be kept informed of the work plan for future years.

—The Committee proposes that the following tax measures be evaluated by the Department of Finance: The GST, the new tax treatment for retirement savings, the tax treatment of capital gains and flow-through shares, and the Canadian Exploration Incentive Program.

—The Committee would like to see the publication of an annual accounting of tax expenditures as part of the budget process.

—The Committee expects the Comptroller General to report to it regularly, in order to determine Department of Finance compliance with Treasury Board directives requiring periodic evaluation of all programs.

—In order to avoid setting a precedent, the Committee recommends that, before any dismantlement, there be more consultations between the departments and the Comptroller General, and that the process be more transparent.

[*English*]

Mr. Darryl L. Gray (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Mr. Speaker, I too am pleased to be able to participate in this debate on concurrence of the report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

I listened with great interest to my hon. colleagues across the floor as we debate the concurrence motion for the report. However, I also listen with interest as we banter back and forth as to who is really accountable to the Canadian taxpayer. I think that if we asked ourselves

the question, it is this House of Parliament which is directly accountable to the Canadian taxpayer.

I would like to use overhead as an example, very briefly, as I notice the time is passing quickly.

We talk about overhead, as has been mentioned by government members, for the tax evaluation function. Since I began my career in federal politics in 1984 I found and still do find it quite disturbing—and I would assume that I speak on behalf of most members on both sides of the House—that with 295 elected members across this great land of ours and with in excess of 300,000 bureaucrats I do not know who actually runs this country.

I listened with interest to the chairman of the public accounts committee. I congratulate him and his committee members for the fine work they have done. I think probably one of the main results of the McGrath commission was to give more individual members more say and power in the functioning of the government. I have some difficulty with what the report recommends—and other members have said it—that in terms of accountability and the tax evaluation function we should perhaps add more bureaucrats.

Do not get me wrong. I do not intend to say that bureaucrats are evil. Bureaucrats are not evil. They are people we need as elected members, people who must be there to carry out programs and the ordinary everyday functioning of the government.

The McGrath report recommended that we should be able as backbenchers, as ministers, as parliamentary secretaries, to speak and say what we feel and what we think and be heard. If this McGrath report is to be held in the esteem that I know all members hold it in, the public accounts committee is entitled, as it has done in the past and I would assume will continue to do in the future, to invite as its witnesses, the top management, the Auditor General and the Comptroller General. These people are and must be at the disposition of these committees, not only the public accounts committee but all committees and all departments so that the elected people can request and question information that is so vital to our proper functioning.

I listened also with some interest as we went back to R. B. Bennett. Unfortunately I have not attained the same age as my hon. colleague from Ottawa—Vanier who spoke previously. He talked about who the culprits in our national debt were. I received in my office last evening