

*Speaker's Ruling*

lead to an Appropriation Act to be adopted by the House usually no later than the end of June.

[*English*]

That said, however, I must also state that when the House concurred in the Twelfth Report of the Public Accounts Committee in 1982, the House endorsed the committee's support for the new style of presenting the Estimates devised by the government in response to a recommendation put forward by the Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee.

• (1010)

This new format makes up the complete estimates and all three parts are necessary for the standing committees to do their work effectively. Part I provides an overview of the government's spending plan while Part III gives details for the expenditure proposals and expectations of each department.

Part III, therefore, is necessary to the standing committees if they are to adequately understand the votes they must consider that are presented in Part II, the Main Estimates. In this particular case the frustration is all the greater because the 14 missing reports, I understand, constitute approximately 75 per cent of the government's proposed spending for the fiscal year 1990-91. Were these documents to remain unavailable, the work of the standing committees would be seriously handicapped.

However, the parliamentary secretary indicated at the time that the government fully intended to present those documents on or before March 12. Indeed, they were tabled on March 5. There remains, I believe, a sufficient opportunity for the standing committees to do their work in the time they have available up to the end of May.

The second objection raised concerning the Estimates was brought up by the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby who complained about the inadequate information she had received from Treasury Board

officials during the lock-up prior to the presentation of the Estimates in the House Thursday, February 22.

The member explained that she had asked specific questions about the impact of the budget on women's programs, multiculturalism, native affairs and programs assisting visible minorities. Despite the fact that officials told her that the information she sought would not be available for a week or so, the hon. member learned from some women's groups of the effects of the budget on their organizations shortly after returning to her office after the lock-up. This, she contended, proved that the information was available but that it had been withheld from members of Parliament. In consequence, the hon. member raised this issue because she felt it constituted a breach of privilege.

[*Translation*]

After having examined the question both in terms of privilege and in terms of contempt of the House, I cannot conclude that the question raised by the hon. member meets the very narrow criteria of privilege, which concerns certain very specific rights deemed necessary for hon. members to carry out their duties and assume their responsibilities.

[*English*]

The lock-up is provided by the government in order to give members information on the Estimates in advance of their presentation in the House. The fact that the government has undertaken to provide the lock-up suggests, on the face of it anyway, that the government understands the needs of members to have this kind of information. At the same time, however, the lock-up is not a procedure of the House and there is no guarantee the government will furnish absolutely all the information that might be requested.

Moreover, there was nothing in the hon. member's presentations to suggest that Treasury Board officials sought wilfully to deprive her of the information. Such a situation, while it may indeed be a grievance, does not, in this context at least, constitute a question of privilege or contempt.