

Routine Proceedings

The appropriate time to debate is after the comprehensive report. Then members would have the committee's point of view, the government's point of view, and we could engage in real dialogue. We are sort of blowing by that opportunity with a premature motion for concurrence.

We are asking the House to concur in something that it has not had an adequate response to. We are asking the House to vote for something that it does not know enough about. I think that is inappropriate. That is what is wrong with what is happening here this morning.

We do that from time to time. Every time we do it I think it is wrong. When we move too quickly for concurrence in a report, especially one that deals with difficult and technical subject matter, then we are cheating the Canadian taxpayers out of the kinds of concerns and considerations that we are obliged to provide them with.

This should be a Chamber of serious thought, of serious reflection and of serious debate. If we have no other point of view on a subject matter as important as this, we run the risk of reaching some bad conclusions. It is guaranteed. It is not a risk. It is guaranteed that the time we take in debate costs lots of money. Every hour this place operates is a very expensive hour. Do we spend it on this subject matter, that subject matter, or the next subject matter? It depends.

The chairman of the committee has decided that today we shall spend it on the second report. I simply say to the chairman in the future that he should reflect a little more. If he wants the House to debate the matter and if he wants to move concurrence, then he should not ask for a comprehensive government report unless he intends to not move the actual concurrence until that report is part of the House.

The report may indeed be perfectly satisfactory to all members, in which case two hours of House time could be saved and that is several hundred thousand dollars.

This morning we were talking about committee travel for the public accounts committee itself. We could not have had this two-hour debate today and there would have been enough funds saved to send the committee to Washington several times. We would still have saved the

taxpayers of this country money. We make choices and some of them are better than others.

I want to mention just a few words out of the report itself because they have not had what I would consider to be the proper emphasis. Let us remember that the report is unanimous. This is the third paragraph of the report. The opening sentence reads:

Program evaluation is all the more important in the current context of budgetary restraint since resource optimization is now obligatory.

I have sat through Question Period in this Parliament for over three years and this is the first documented case in which the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party of Canada signed a document saying that financial restraint is now obligatory. Is that not marvellous? I wonder if we will see that in Question Period today. Get up and ask about this obligatory restraint.

Mr. Gauthier: I know what the answer is going to be.

Mr. Hawkes: You know what the answer is going to be. For instance, is the chairman of the committee going to ask the Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister what the deficit situation is today compared to what it was, and then give the Prime Minister a chance to say that when the Conservatives came into office after those bad guys, the Liberals, were in office for so long the Conservatives had to borrow \$16.1 billion? That was \$16.1 billion simply to assist in the provision of programs and services in this country and that was in 1984.

As a result of this obligatory spending restraint we are in the position today of having a surplus of \$12.7 billion on programs and services that we can apply to the interest on the public debt.

We inherited a situation in which we were borrowing \$16.1 billion for programs and services, plus every penny for interest on the public debt. We have turned it around in seven short years into a surplus position. There is no other turnaround of that magnitude in the western world.

How did we do that? It was because we were attuned. Members on this side of the House, chair after chair, desk after desk after desk, committee after committee after committee, brought to this House a concern for practical common sense management. That is what program evaluation is all about. It is about looking at a situation and asking: "Are we wasting money or are we spending money wisely?" It is a belief that pennies add up to dollars, dollars add up to \$10, \$10 add