

PRIVATE BILLS

[English]

THE NATIONAL DENTAL EXAMINING BOARD OF CANADA

On the order:

Second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Private Bills and Standing Orders of Bill S-7, an act respecting the National Dental Examining Board of Canada—Mr. Railton.

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. member who has this bill in his name is not prepared to proceed with it at the present time. There have been discussions and I think there would be agreement to take notice of motion for the production of papers No. 88 in the name of the hon. member for Toronto-Lakeshore (Mr. Grier).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Hon. members have heard the suggestion of the parliamentary secretary. Is there unanimous consent that we consider at this time, and stand other items, notice of motion No. 88 as it appears on the order paper.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS—REQUEST FOR COPY OF PROGRAM FORECAST OF DEPARTMENT, INCLUDING BUDGETS A,B,X

Mr. Terry Grier (Toronto-Lakeshore) moved:

That an order of the House do issue for a complete copy (including budgets A, B, X) of the Program Forecast (Program Review) by the Department of Veterans Affairs for the latest year for which parliament approved departmental expenditures.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the debate this afternoon in effect continues one begun last May 24 when a similar motion for the production of a program forecast for the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce was considered by this House. I wish to be as brief as I can, bearing in mind that a number of points on both sides of the argument have already been made. I think it is worth repeating, however, that this motion for the production of papers has perhaps less to do with the Department of Veterans Affairs per se than it has with the principle of the need of hon. members for information upon which to base their judgment concerning the wisdom of expenditure proposals of the government.

I may say in passing that there are a number of similar motions standing in my name for the production of program forecasts for other departments. The debate is really about the kind of information available to members of parliament upon which they can come to some kind of informed and educated conclusion concerning the wisdom of the vast array of expenditure proposals put before them in the form of the main estimates, the blue book.

Motions for Papers

I noted when I last spoke on the subject that there seemed to be a general tendency on the part of governments of all political stripes to regard material produced within the public service as secret, confidential and not for the eyes of the public, the media or members of parliament. While I admit at the outset that certain kinds of documents, in the interest of the public service and in the interest of effective and fair government, perhaps ought not to be made available, my view is that this general tendency extends to almost any documents at the disposal of the ministry in the course of its arriving at proposals.

I pointed out at the time that the program forecasts would be of particular use to members of parliament in so far as they provide really three forms of illumination upon the process through which the ministry goes in arriving at its final expenditure proposals. I noted that program forecasts really fall into three categories. There is budget A, which is simply a forecast of expenditures in the current year for those programs undertaken in the previous year; second, budget B contains a schedule of the cost of new implemental programs which the ministry would wish to undertake; and, finally, there is budget X, which refers to the programs which, other things being equal, the ministry might be prepared to dispense with in order to obtain funds to proceed with new programs.

It seems to me that kind of information, perhaps in modified form, would provide members of parliament on all sides of the House with an insight into the type of considerations the ministry went through, and would save time and provide a good deal of valuable information to members in coming to a conclusion concerning the wisdom of the government's expenditures, which I need hardly tell this House run to many billions of dollars.

The ministry has at its disposal all the resources of the public service in the preparation of its estimates and programs, and so it should. But speaking as one member of parliament, I wish some of those resources, or should I say some more of those resources, were shared with the ordinary members of parliament on all sides. We are not asking for all the data having to do with the planned programs and budgeting system as suggested by the hon. member for York West (Mr. Fleming). I would be prepared to settle for some editing of the program forecast as it now stands, in order to protect the curious inner workings of the ministry and to prevent public servants feeling inhibited in making recommendations.

It may well boil down to the fact that what I would be prepared to settle for lies somewhere between what the government is now prepared to give us and what these motions call for. But I see great merit and great need for the provision of some information which would present members with a broader base upon which to come to a judgment without imperilling the government's budgetary system.

As the hon. member for York West said last May, the power to govern rests with the government. I cannot quarrel with that. But the right to grant or withhold supply is the most ancient right of parliament itself which was wrested from reluctant governments over the course of centuries. What I am asking for is more sound information on the basis of which parliament can grant or withhold supply. I am not talking about prejudging the conclu-