

Government Orders

some of the problems related to the division of federal and provincial powers concerning environmental matters.

There is no question that the auditor general could undertake a more expansive role. He has said it to members of the standing committee. More important, if we were to ask the average person on the street we would discover that the vast majority is totally opposed to new levels of bureaucracy.

My constituents in New Westminster—Burnaby feel there is already far too much bureaucracy in government. When they find out that the government is passing legislation to add another level, my office phone might ring off the hook.

I refer to another important statement in the committee's report which reflects exactly what the Reform proposed in clause by clause consideration in committee:

—it would appear that the Auditor General Act does not need to be amended in order for the auditor general, on his own volition, to expand his audit activities in the areas of environmental and sustainable development auditing.

On the other hand, the act will have to be amended if the government wishes to make environmental and sustainability auditing a mandatory activity. The committee members were of the opinion that the Auditor General Act should be amended to this effect.

• (1550)

The Reform Party believes in sustainable development. We believe that through responsible economic development and the economic capacity that results, the environment will be sustained for all Canadians to enjoy.

The Reform Party supports the federal government taking leadership in developing a new discipline of integrating economics and the environment. However, while we support the truest definition of sustainable development we also support going about change in the most economical and pragmatic way possible.

Bill C-83 is definitely not cost effective. The installation of the environmental commissioner could cost upwards of \$5 million in the next few years. We should consider the amount that was spent by the auditor general's office in 1993. In this year \$4.5 million or 7.5 per cent of the entire auditor general's budget was spent on audits of programs and activities of the federal government.

I do not believe that the activities of the commissioner will need \$5 million to operate. If the auditor general's office were to get just a portion of that amount, I am sure it would be able to hire the appropriate staff and perform the functions of the commissioner very admirably. However, we know it is about prestige and status. Prestige will be bought with a huge no cut

contract for some so-called superstar and his or her appropriate entourage.

I cannot support a bill that does not take economic matters into consideration. If the government were serious about doing the right thing, it would have accepted Reform's proposal to get rid of the aspect of commissioner and hand over the responsibilities to the auditor general. Unfortunately such was not the case.

The environmental community and the Liberals when in opposition wanted a completely independent watchdog of the government concerning environmental matters. They saw the policy need and the need related to control, lines of accountability and the reporting structure. The independent commissioner was to have meaningful investigative powers and was intended to embarrass and expose laxity, rule breaking and poor administration on environmental matters. Now that the Liberals are in government the red book's high sounding phrases are only phrases. The bill it has now brought forward as a government is much less than what it promised.

The decision has been made: no independent commissioner or environmental auditor general. If we are not to have one, why not facilitate the auditor general's office with a little more resources and some enhanced legislative mandate and encourage him to get on with it? Not the Liberals; they want it both ways.

There will be business as usual but the bill also creates a new title under auditor general who has a position identified and set out with legislative status. With a magic wand we have an environmental commissioner. There are great press release opportunities, a high profile appointment and international advertising for the position. I wonder if the superstar contract will be larger than the boss to whom he reports, the auditor general.

If we have to spend more on environmental auditing, it should give the auditor general some resources and an enhanced mandate. It should not try to fool the public into thinking that it has something that was promised. The government should do one or the other. I can imagine the morale problems these new favoured environmental kids will cause in the regular office of the auditor general.

The bill does not make sense from a public administration point of view. The whole exercise as constituted is not likely to be good dollar value. The bill tries to take things both ways, but no one is fooled. Either we have a real auditor general for the environment or we do not.

If it is to be a subset and a listed function of the current auditor general, let us be forthright about it. The expensive optics game of the bill is out of sync with what the country wants and needs. Whom are we trying to impress? Is it the public or maybe the