

Mr. Paproski: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. member I should like to have the matter transferred for debate.

Mr. Speaker: Transferred for debate. Shall the remaining notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

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[English]

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

Mr. Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate have passed Bill S-9, an act to implement an agreement between Canada and Malaysia and conventions between Canada and Spain, Canada and Liberia, Canada and Austria, and Canada and Italy, for the avoidance of double taxation with respect to income tax, to which the concurrence of this House is desired.

● (1642)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION ACT

AMENDMENT TO ESTABLISH OFFICE OF COMPTROLLER GENERAL

Hon. Judd Buchanan (for the President of the Treasury Board) moved that Bill C-10, to amend the Financial Administration Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates.

Mr. Thomas H. Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I think that hon. members are aware that in the absence of the President of the Treasury Board I have been asked to present in his name the remarks he would have liked to make himself before the House this afternoon. You will remember, Mr. Speaker, that in his statement to the House last April, on the occasion of second reading of the Auditor General Act, the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) announced the intention of the government to create the office of the Comptroller General of Canada. That measure follows the main recommendation of the annual report of the Auditor General of Canada presented in 1976.

The object of Bill C-10, to amend the Financial Administration Act, is to establish a position of deputy head of a department whose incumbent, made accountable to the Treasury Board, would be made responsible for ensuring the quality and the integrity of the financial administration systems

Financial Administration Act

and the related practices and methods used in the federal public service. Hon. members will not fail to notice that the wording of the proposed amendment reflect the provisions of section 4(2) of the Financial Administration Act. This section describes the rank and status of the Treasury Board secretary. The Comptroller General will be responsible to the President of the Treasury Board and this office will actually be a new and somewhat specialized body serving the Treasury Board. It is therefore important that the part of the act governing among other things the structure of the board as well as the implementation of its responsibilities in the field of management, be modified.

In his previous statement, Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board described the main tasks and responsibilities of that new function. Not only will the Comptroller General have to answer to the Treasury Board on the quality and the integrity of the financial management policy, on the ways and control systems, but he will also have to establish and implement the policies, procedures and ways needed to assess the efficiency and the working of government programs, and submit reports on those matters. To prevent any misunderstanding, I would like to take a few moments to discuss the nature of the relations between the Comptroller General, on the one hand, and the other deputy heads of departments, the government, the Auditor General and the secretary of the Treasury Board, on the other hand.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, to keep in mind that in matters of financial management and control, basic responsibility and accountability are at the subhead level, where they should remain. However, as pointed out by the Auditor General in his report of last year, efficient control includes the distribution of responsibilities and system so that the work of one person or system component be constantly and automatically checked by another person on component, without unnecessary overlapping.

Therefore, while comptrollers in the various departments will report directly to their subheads, a functional relationship will develop with the Comptroller General, who will be the outside official responsible for scrutinizing department systems. The Comptroller General will issue guidelines to help departments discharge their responsibilities in respect of financial management and program evaluation practices.

Mr. Speaker, as is clearly stated in this legislation, the Comptroller General would report to the government through the President of the Treasury Board. This involves a logical and necessary relationship. Systems under the Comptroller General are aimed at ensuring that the government have pertinent, precise and complete information. In the development of systems, the incumbent should therefore consult the people who will be using them and account for the resources used. Such a relationship with the government would also enhance the Auditor General's efficiency, allowing as it would the nomination of a high-ranking official who would be