

Financial Administration Act

cerns over the years—concerns about the state of financial control within the over-all government service.

While I am certain the hon. member is endeavouring to be as sincere as possible, I feel that he is significantly off base in suggesting that the legislation establishing this position, unlike legislation governing the establishment of other departments, should be defined in such specific language that it would tie down the Comptroller General, who after all will be a very senior civil servant. The hon. member indicates that the bill should define the role of the Comptroller General to the extent that he would have inadequate freedom of movement and inadequate ability to fill out his responsibilities and to make himself the effective official he must be in order to accomplish the tasks which are set before him.

Rather than condemning the fact that the bill contains only 15 lines, I think this is a most positive aspect. Mr. Harry Rogers—the appointee designate—himself has said in the few public comments he has made since his appointment that he will need at least six months to sort his way through and to determine an appropriate course of action. As one who has been involved in financial administration in the private sector I understand exactly what Mr. Rogers is saying. His job will probably be the most difficult financial administration job anyone in this country could be asked to do.

I understand that Mr. Rogers will be taking a very significant cut in his own remuneration in order to devote himself to this task. He obviously thinks it is important or he would not accept it. I think it is essential that we give him all the leeway we can so that he can be as effective as possible. He will have to determine his detailed responsibilities and work in close collaboration with senior civil servants in all departments, and hopefully in Crown corporations as well. He will have to establish his credibility.

There is no question that any large organization looks upon a person coming into the area of financial control with a certain degree of concern. They wonder what this individual will do and what effect he will have on their operations. They wonder how they should respond to and interact with him. This is natural and understandable. Senior bureaucrats on the Ottawa scene will be looking at this new position with a great deal of interest and concern. I think it is important that we give the new Comptroller General all the leeway necessary to establish himself and to make himself as effective as the Auditor General and President of the Treasury Board intends he should be.

In my view, the simpler this bill is, the better. In its present form it is simple. It contains only 15 lines, and I suggest to the hon. member for Brant, the hon. member for Calgary Centre and others who will be on the committee examining the details of the bill that we should leave it that way. We should let the new Comptroller General do his job and help him by leaving the bill in this existing form.

The hon. member for Brant raised many other points regarding committees and so forth. I would like to touch upon those points in the course of my remarks, but I want to come back for a moment to the bill itself. There is no question in the

minds of most members of parliament that it is high time this kind of position was established. The annual expenditures of the government are now between \$40 billion and \$50 billion. Ten or 11 years ago expenditures were \$8 billion to \$10 billion. The Glassco commission recommended a great deal of decentralization in its report back in the early sixties when expenditures were around \$5 billion. Decentralization was accomplished to such a degree of success that the control features which existed after decentralization was put into place were so thin and tenuous that decentralization tended to take over.

In the meantime budgets were growing at a rapid rate, and the controls which should have been in place were never put into place. On the one hand, decentralization was taking place. We were moving away from the old green eye-shade, centralized accounting, which was an extremely good move. But at the same time budgets were increasing substantially, which had the over-all effect of loosening control from the central area to such an extent that in many cases it almost ceased to exist.

The Auditor General brought his own expertise which he had developed in the private sector. Many corporations had gone through this same scenario in years gone by. Over the last 25 or 30 years hardly a major corporation in North America has not gone through this same business of moving from the old centralized, detailed type of accounting control to a decentralization phase, but with the establishment, in most cases at the same time, of a more modern concept of financial management which ensured that sufficient controls were indeed in place to meet the needs of the growing and modernizing phase that most corporations were going through. The only difference here is that we are seeing the process happening in government some 25 years later.

I suggest that the response which has been made by the former president of the treasury board, now the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) and by the present President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) to the suggestions made by the Auditor General, members of parliament and active members of the public accounts committee is an example for other levels of government across the country. In my view they are likely to copy that example in the not too distant future.

● (2102)

I think, Mr. Speaker, generally this augurs well for the ordinary Canadian taxpayer because if there is one thing that concerns people today it is to be sure that moneys spent in their interests by the various levels of governments at least are spent in a manner that ensures that the normal types of financial controls are in place similar to those that they expect to find in large companies with whom they are familiar—oil companies, department stores, etc.—in endeavouring to ensure they run successful businesses.

So, Mr. Speaker, the fact that the bill is before us at this time I think is indeed another encouraging sign of the way in which this government is prepared to respond to the real needs of the day. I want to make that point and again emphasize that I think it would be a mistake to try and tie the new