

*Government Orders*

development be established by new and separate legislation. However the bill is an amendment to the Auditor General Act. The bill is neither a new nor a separate piece of legislation.

The government promised in its red book that it would appoint an environmental auditor. The bill does not do that. It creates in legislation the position of a clerk who reports to the auditor general, a clerk with a limited role and with very few powers, not anything remotely close to an independent environmental auditor.

The standing committee on the environment recommended that the government establish a new office designated the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development. The legislation does not establish a new office.

The commissioner of the environment is clearly not an independent environmental auditor general but a clerk reporting to the auditor general who will assist with environmental issues. It is not independent. It is not powerful. It is a clerk.

I am sure the auditor general already has several assistants to help him with environmental issues. I question the need to entrench the position in legislation, especially given the limited mandate spelled out in the legislation. The government has severely reduced the scope and extent of the position by establishing the commissioner of the environment within the offices of the auditor general in a position.

I can question how much if any the new position will actually change the status quo. The auditor general already responds to environmental issues. Now he has his new clerk entrenched in legislation to help him with the issues. This does not change anything.

The red book promised the environmental auditor general would report directly to Parliament. This was also recommended by the standing committee. Again the government has reneged on its promise. The bill comes up short of fulfilling this promise. Bill C-83 proposes the new assistant to the auditor general will report to the auditor general, not to Parliament as promised. When the commissioner reports to Parliament it is through the auditor general, not as an independent body.

The committee also recommended that the commissioner submit an annual report to Parliament. The bill proposes that the commissioner's annual report to Parliament will be on behalf of the auditor general who does the same thing. Appointing an assistant to speak for the auditor general hardly changes the status quo.

Another recommendation from the standing committee on the environment which the minister has ignored is that all reports produced by the commissioner be referred automatically to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development or to one or more parliamentary committees if the subject matter of the report makes it appropriate or necessary. Again

there is nothing in the bill to support the committee recommendations.

Within the duties of the commissioner of the environment the only reports the commissioner will be making to Parliament on behalf of the auditor general will be related to the status of environmental petitions brought to the attention of government and the status of departmental sustainable strategies. The bill does not empower the commissioner of the environment to report on much more than these two items.

In addition, the role of reporting on departmental sustainable development strategies is not a new initiative of the government. It was tried before when the last government attempted to establish an office that would report on the status of departmental sustainable development strategies. This office was called the office of environmental stewardship. Its mandate was to carry out environmental audits of federal departments and agencies in co-operation with the office of the comptroller general. The details and funding arrangements were all laid out in the green plan. This April we learned that the plug had been pulled on the green plan. It appears that this same office created by the last government has been dismissed by this government and reintroduced as a new initiative. The games they play in the tired politics of the old line parties.

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The committee also recommended that the commissioner be granted in legislation adequate access to information powers commensurate with his or her mandate. Given that the mandate for the commissioner is so weak clearly explains why the bill contains no such recommendations.

The minister also completely ignored the committee recommendation for the commissioner to have the discretionary powers to appoint individuals to one or more advisory committees to assist the office in the performance of its duties. This committee recommendation has been completely ignored.

The committee also recommended that legislation to appoint the commissioner should be with the approval of Parliament. Instead the bill allows the auditor general to appoint the commissioner in accordance with the Public Service Employment Act. Actually, this is one recommendation of the minister which merits serious consideration because in this instance it may eliminate the potential for a patronage appointment, an area where this government has been so free. By allowing the auditor general to appoint a commissioner of the environment the position will be more at arm's length from the government.

There is nothing in the bill that outlines the term or length of office for the commissioner. The standing committee recommended that the position be held for a term of five years which may be reviewed only once, in other words a 10 year maximum. The position would have a specified length of term. By allowing the position to be renewed only once would prevent a monopoly