

As foreign policy is becoming increasingly important, it has a major impact on what happens within the country. I remember an American representative from Boston saying: "All politics are okay."

It is somewhat the same now, in a way. "All politics are okay in Canada." There is, however, an impact on international policy, and international policy affects domestic policy in almost all areas. This is increasingly commonplace.

The government wants parliamentarians to participate to some extent, to exercise a certain right of regard on what is happening, on the way departments and programs are operating. A joint committee has proposed a number of guidelines, which we will discuss. We started discussing some, and the government issued a policy statement, which we will talk about as well.

Foreign affairs will require parliamentarians and senators to be ever more vigilant. We are already doing studies in our committee, and I think we are going about it pretty seriously. We have already done it, for example, for the free trade agreement, NAFTA and the GATT. We must realize these are treaties negotiated between governments, which are subsequently ratified by Parliament. Treaties are like royal prerogative: Parliament considers them only after agreements are reached. It simply ratifies the treaty, even though we must amend a series of laws to do so.

I wondered whether one solution to this — and I have not discussed this with my leader and so am not making a formal proposal — might not be for parliamentarians to participate by examining budget estimates in the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs. This could be a relatively permanent job of the committee.

Let me elaborate on this. I know all about the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance because I am a member of the committee. It traditionally does not study the content of programs as much as it looks at the government's administrative policy, including financial administration, staffing, procurement, et cetera. In areas like employment, education and health, we examine more the public administration policy end of things than the content itself.

I think that has been the traditional role of the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance, and Senator Doody will confirm this. The committee is not bound by this, but reports done on the issue over the past several years do show that, by and large, the committee does focus on administrative policy much more than on public policy.

This is why I propose that we look into the estimates in order to get a better feel for the activities of the Department of Foreign Affairs. This is important because senior officials, be they ambassadors or departmental executives have considerable leeway. Approximately 11 or 12 per cent of Foreign Affairs employees are executives, whereas, in other departments, that figure is only 2 or 3 per cent. They perform important functions. They participate in negotiations on international trade, like Mr. Reis, for example, while others are involved in consular affairs or work on defence committees. They play very important roles. It seems to me that this could be a reasonable proposal. I am not making an official proposal, but I would like to submit it

as food for thought and I would like to see us study the issue one day.

[English]

Hon. John B. Stewart: Honourable senators, clause 7 of the bill to amend the Department of External Affairs Act provides that hereafter section 10(3) will read as follows:

The Minister may develop and carry out programs related to the Minister's powers, duties and functions for the promotion of Canada's interests abroad, including:

(a) the fostering of the expansion of Canada's international trade and commerce; and

(b) the provision of assistance for developing countries.

That is the general and vague language to which Senator Bolduc has referred. In substance, this new subsection will be the same as the one it would supplant.

I agree with Senator Bolduc entirely when he says that the language is general and vague. At the same time, it seems inevitable that when Parliament confers powers and duties on ministers in relation to foreign affairs, the language used must lack the precision of laws of domestic application. At the same time, we all recognize that how ministers perform their duties and exercise their powers is becoming increasingly important to the people of Canada. In the report of the Special Joint Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy there is reference to this matter. At page 87 of the report, it states:

In today's interdependent world, international relations have an increasingly direct effect on the well-being of Canadians. They should therefore have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the complexities of foreign policy, and to have an input into decisions that affect them.

Over the page it states:

If Parliamentarians are to play a larger role in assisting Canadians to appreciate the impact of international relations on their daily lives, it is important that they themselves be well informed.

Last December when Bill C-57, to implement the agreement establishing the World Trade Organization, was before the Foreign Affairs Committee, we spent a fair amount of time talking about the need to assure that this new international organization will not come to be operated by officials cut off from the representatives of the people of Canada. If the organization, or any of the other comparable international organizations, operates in isolation, it will not be able to do its work with full efficiency.

• (1500)

The question that Senator Bolduc has addressed is the same one which concerns me: How can we help assure that those ministers who have heavy duties and great powers in foreign affairs, affairs which are increasingly important to Canada, remain responsible to Parliament and retain the support of Parliament? I think Senator Bolduc is right. The way to do it is the traditional way of referring the spending estimates of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to the