

industry. This resulted in the hiring of 32 accountants representing the largest chartered accountants firms in the country whose responsibilities would be to review completely the financial performance and the administrative controls of the government.

Madam Speaker, that work lasted a year. It resulted in the publication of a 500-page report which the government ministers have received and which will be tabled at the same time as the yearly report from the Auditor General of Canada, that is in early December. This report reviews the administrative performance of 28 government departments.

It is useless for me, Madam Speaker, to list the 28 government departments. However, I can assure you that another task force made up of 28 accountants from the private sector is presently investigating the administration of Crown agencies. When the Auditor General presents his next report, we will be able to see how the Crown agencies are administered and how the public funds are spent within those agencies.

Of course, Madam Speaker, 500-page report on government management tabled in the House may seem voluminous. Let me only mention that his review deals especially with budget preparation and control.

Madam Speaker, since your election, you had the opportunity, as I had, to receive what we call the blue book. Who in the House can make an efficient and intelligent use of that blue book? The manner in which government expenditures are presently recorded in this book makes it impossible for members of the House to use it.

It was essential that a group of qualified people examine the way the expenses are reported an accounted for, as well as the way the government allocates the various funds within the programs. I believe, Madam Speaker, that the first objective of the study conducted by the Auditor General was precisely to strengthen the control of the House over government spending.

As previously mentioned, Madam Speaker, I think it is much more difficult to criticize the way the blue book is drafted than to give dinner speeches across Canada.

The second element of the study conducted by the Auditor General was the financial reporting systems. We know for a fact that departments and Crown agencies must submit interim reports periodically on the progress and amount of government revenue and expenses. Again the Auditor General has directed that a study be conducted which will allow us to scrutinize public spending more closely and more directly. He has also directed that this study include financial control of government expenses and income, assets and liabilities.

Then again, Madam Speaker, it is one of the essential tools available to both sides of the House to make sure that the expenditures are consistent with the purpose of the legislation passed in the House. Of course, are also included all aspects of the internal auditing, staffing and the flow charts of all departments. That 500-page study will be summarized in a 125-page document, and all the responsible ministers will have the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and to answer for the comments reported in the Auditor General's report and in that study which I just mentioned.

#### *Government Spending*

I think that thanks to the sense of responsibility of the present Auditor General of Canada and the manner in which he views his duties, we can be sure that the administrative and miscellaneous government expenditures are properly scrutinized. And I am sure that all members who have attended the meetings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts since the beginning of the 30th Parliament, readily acknowledged that the present Auditor General will be the most outstanding incumbent of that office.

And this explains why Mr. Wilson who attended the annual Auditor General conference last September mentioned that most of his recommendations could be almost readily accepted by the government and the Auditor General.

My colleague, the chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, said this afternoon that many of those recommendations could be adopted and implemented and would not require any new legislation. And at least nine of these recommendations have already resulted in initiatives and action from the Office of the Auditor General.

I believe, Madam Speaker, that the way the situation evolved since about a year ago is somewhat reassuring at least as far as administrative controls are concerned. I think that if we have to be accountable for something, it is more or less for the way the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is operating. And this is why I wish to draw your attention on the way this committee has changed in recent years.

I think that the Public Accounts Committee has a special role to play, a special job to do. It does not hold discussions nor does it get its orders directly from the government. It is not a committee which deals with bills or has work of an irregular nature to do. The terms of reference of this committee are closely related to the daily administrative chores of the government. Consequently, I think that the nature of that committee and its functions should encourage us to change its approach entirely. It is a committee which has a near judicial status, that is to say with a membership that should never submit to individual party lines or show political bias. And I said before that the chairman of the committee, since he has been appointed to that office, has tried to conduct the debates without reference to the political options represented by everyone in this House.

I think that the members of the committee should first attend the meetings and then stay on the committee for more than the duration of a session. In fact, as in the case of a court, a judicial institution, just like the judges, its members should not be affected by political pressures or have terms of office too short to let them fulfill their functions satisfactorily.

Consequently, the first amendment that should be made would be to set the Public Accounts Committee on a permanent basis. This committee should sit as long as required by its work and as long as the report of the Auditor General and the financial statements of the government have not been discussed at length. Moreover, the members of this committee should be appointed for at least four years and should not be changed except under exceptional circumstances. Also, the committee's calendar should not necessarily coincide with that of the session of the House. During a fiscal year, the House might sit for