

[English]

### ENERGY

#### REASON FOR DELAY IN FORMING MARITIME ENERGY CORPORATION—MOTION UNDER S.O. 43

**Mr. J. Robert Howie (York-Sunbury):** Mr. Speaker, I rise under the provisions of Standing Order 43. Whereas the Maritime Energy Corporation is a concept of vital importance to the development and transmission of electric power in the maritime provinces, and whereas after the initial announcement over a year ago by the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie) for Canada and the maritime premiers the corporation is still not in existence, I move, seconded by the hon. member for Central Nova (Mr. MacKay):

That the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources be directed to make a statement on motions indicating the reasons for delay in formation of the Maritime Energy Corporation and the steps that must be taken to activate it.

**Mr. Speaker:** The presentation of such a motion at this time, in conformity with Standing Order 43, would require the unanimous consent of the House. Is there unanimous consent?

**Some hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. Members:** No.

### ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

### FINANCE

#### ACCURACY OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

**Mr. Harvie Andre (Calgary Centre):** Mr. Speaker, my question would have been to the President of the Treasury Board, whom we were told was going to be here today. In his absence, I will direct it to the Minister of Finance. It has to do with the public accounts tabled yesterday, and the statement by the Auditor General therein that the public accounts again this year overstate assets of the government and understate expenditures. I am sure the Minister of Finance would agree that accurate public accounts are absolutely essential and would recognize that a private company with that kind of qualified audit would, in fact, be called to account by the responsible regulatory authority.

My question to the Minister of Finance, if he is in a position to answer, is: when will the government take action on the recommendations of the Auditor General and ensure that the public accounts are a true and honest statement of government accounts?

**Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, over a period of years we have been receiving good advice from the Auditor General. We have made a lot of corrections. The President of the Treasury Board will look into these recom-

### Oral Questions

mendations and do what he can in the circumstances. I cannot say more than that. I expect my colleague to be in the House later in the question period.

**Mr. Andre:** The Auditor General also points out that the failure of the government to consolidate certain Crown corporations within government accounts creates a distorted picture of government accounts, assets and spending. It has also been the practice of this government not to declare in estimates certain Crown corporation borrowings and then to claim that these are somehow cuts in spending.

In view of the fact that the government has apparently dismissed the Auditor General's recommendation that there be this consolidation of Crown corporations, in the interests of honesty and a completely accurate picture, will the Minister of Finance indicate to the House why this recommendation is dismissed and why we are not being given an accurate picture of government spending, its assets position and its balance-sheet and income statement?

**Mr. Chrétien:** Mr. Speaker, all Crown corporations report to this House through ministers. When somebody wants to know the exact picture of a Crown corporation, they can obtain that information. On the technical problem raised by the hon. member, I stated that the President of the Treasury Board is looking into that and will certainly reply to the hon. member.

● (1417)

**Mr. Andre:** I ask the Minister of Finance a specific and simple question. The Auditor General has pointed out that assets and investments in some Crown corporations are listed as assets when in fact they are written off and should be listed as expenditures. They should be put on the expenditure side; they should not be claimed as some sort of investment. The corporations mentioned are the National Harbours Board, the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority and Atomic Energy of Canada Limited.

Can we at least have an assurance that this simple book-keeping procedure will be followed, so that with respect to at least those three Crown corporations we will have an accurate picture of their financial position and the Crown investment therein?

[Translation]

**Mr. Chrétien:** Mr. Speaker, of course, we shall consider very seriously the recommendations of the Auditor General and see what can be done to accommodate him. At the same time we should not disregard the autonomy of Crown corporations which often operate under a law of parliament, and which have very often their own auditors.