

*Government Orders*

two years of the bill coming into force. After that, strategies would have to be updated every three years.

In a nutshell, this will be the job description of the new environmental commissioner within the auditor general's office. In my opinion the tasks themselves are reasonable. The monitoring of departments in terms of sustainable development makes sense, especially when the Ministry of the Environment has failed to do its job on this score. The accepting and passing on of petitions is good as well. It is essential that constituents know that the petitions they file are being reviewed and acted on. However, there is a fundamental flaw in the bill. While the bill creates this high profile commissioner, it gives the person no independent power. That option was rejected by the government.

I mentioned that the job description in the bill was reasonable, and I believe monitoring may make a difference. However, there is no need to create a commissioner to follow through on these objects when the auditor general still has the final say, and his officials have been doing the job for some time.

All of the above mentioned responsibilities could be taken on by the auditor general and be performed effectively and efficiently on a regular basis if he were given the resources. However, I can clearly see why the Minister of the Environment chose to go the route she did. It makes it look as if the government is moving ahead with its environmental responsibilities and fulfilling this longstanding promise. I believe we call this window dressing.

• (1545)

We are in a time of fiscal crisis. The deficit is out of control and things appear to be getting worse instead of better. We need to be tightening our belts instead of loosening them. Government departments need to be amalgamated and consolidated to streamline services. We need to save money at every turn.

The same applies to the issue we are discussing today in the bill. While the ideas are reasonable, the process is not. The duties of the environmental commissioner should be part of the auditor general's regular duties. The auditor general could easily expand and juggle his staff to help in the monitoring of government departments and the transferring of petitions from constituent to minister.

Such a small ordinary solution would not make the minister look environmentally green among her international cohorts. The Liberals overreaching undeliverable promises are now revealed. This is exactly the fundamental problem with the thinking of the government. Image seems to be everything.

Let me inform the Minister of the Environment of what I am hearing from my constituents about how governments should run. They want government to function without the flare and the Cadillac style. They want a government that is fiscally responsible and accountable. They also want an environment minister

who puts environmental results at the top of the agenda within a fiscally responsible framework.

The bill creates redundancy. I have never heard where redundancy was a synonym for responsibility.

In May 1994 the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development tabled a report entitled "The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development". This was the result of many long hours of hearing witnesses and reviewing documentation. I have highlighted some very interesting observations, primarily some from the comments made by the auditor general, Mr. Desautels. He told the committee that his office has for many years "been carrying out much of what would be the main audit responsibilities of an environmental auditor general".

The auditor general also stated that the office, referring to the current auditor general's office, will ensure that in carrying out its responsibilities it makes a positive contribution through audit to the protection and improvement of the national and global environment.

In my reading of the standing committee's report my conclusion was that the auditor general also thinks that his office could handle the increased responsibility and assume the role of monitoring the sustainable development strategies of federal departments.

I want the House to hear the six points the auditor general made when he appeared before the committee on why his office could continue to audit environmental sustainable development issues without any commissioner.

First, there would be no need for a new bureaucracy as an audit infrastructure already exists in the office of the auditor general. It would be less costly to the taxpayer as the office already has the structure in place to provide appropriate training, carry out research, develop methodology and carry out audit work.

Second, the independence, objectivity and credibility of the office of the auditor general are already established.

Third, there would be no confusion or duplication of roles as there might be with a new office of the environmental auditor general.

Fourth, the principles of sustainable development would be reinforced in that the environmental issues are audited together with economic and social ones.

Fifth, one auditor would create less disruption in the organization being audited if an additional external audit were also at work.

Sixth, the auditor general's office through its existing relationships with provincial legislative auditors can promote concurrent and/or joint federal-provincial audits of multi-jurisdictional environmental issues. This could help to overcome