

Government Orders

I want to assure members of Parliament that the legislation before them is based on powers contained in the existing legislation and that any changes are straightforward, common sense changes to which I am confident every Canadian would agree.

Without getting into cumbersome detail, I would like to point out some highlights of the legislation to members. This bill gives legislative approval to the department to create, oversee or transfer information electronically or by other new technologies. That is the kind of common sense change I was talking about. The point is to reflect today's world. When the government started centralized procurement policies in the 1960s nobody had heard of the information highway or personal computers.

Bill C-52 also creates a real property disposition revolving fund. The new fund will simply permit expenditures made in selling off property to be paid from the proceeds of the sale. Right now Parliament provides a specific amount each year for these expenditures. The problem is that it is extremely difficult to know what sales opportunities may come along in any given year. Any annual appropriation by Parliament in the past was based on a guess. The new revolving fund corrects this situation and makes sure that the department's hands are not tied if the chance arises to dispose of excess property at a fair price.

There are other sections of the bill which I think will not be matters of great debate but which do represent key modifications and improvements to the way the department can operate. The new legislation improves upon the legislation it replaces by providing greater flexibility and the removal of administrative impediments to better service for Canadians.

As we stated in the red book, the government will work closely with provincial governments to reduce duplication and improve service delivery in all areas where governments are involved. Under current law, officials on the supply and services side are only permitted to share our purchasing power with other levels of government after first seeking governor in council approval. The public works side does not have this explicit authority.

The current law does not allow the Department of Public Works and Government Services to use its size, expertise and contacts in assisting Canadian businesses to move them to new world markets. The bill before Parliament will allow the department to change all of those practices and to continue to move forward in ensuring that taxpayers get the best bang for their buck by ensuring that we can provide more help to Canadians. This is totally in line with what we laid out in the red book. We have done what we said we would do.

I do not want to take advantage of my colleague's generosity this afternoon so I want to make a few more comments and bring this to an end. I point out to my colleagues that this change is needed in order to make absolutely certain that we have the legislative authority to operate as a department should.

I want to stress that this legislative change is as a result of an action undertaken by a previous government so we are doing what the previous government might have done. I want to stress that this particular change will remove obstacles to good government.

[Translation]

As I said earlier, duplication and overlap will gradually be eliminated, which will allow us to save \$140 million by 1998 and \$1 billion by the year 2000.

I am almost finished. I do not want to prolong this unduly. I hope that I will not only get the support of Reform Party members, who indicated in a clear and honest way that they were ready to look at the bill with an open heart and an open mind, but that the hon. members from the Bloc will agree to reconsider what they said this morning and perhaps propose amendments that could improve the bill instead of simply making unsupported attacks against it. This is not the way one should react.

● (1315)

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides): Mr. Speaker, we have just heard an absolutely wonderful speech. You would think this is the best department in Ottawa. The problem is, I had the opportunity to work in this committee of public works and government services and I was also the official critic.

I can tell you that there is no openness in that department. The hon. member for St. Boniface made a big show of it, but the truth is we never got what we wanted. Every day we asked for information, but this department was never forthcoming. This is the patronage department. Let us be clear on that, there is no hiding it, this is a fact.

The hon. member for St. Boniface is nodding in approval, how very interesting. I know you want to answer my question, so I will give you the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Speaker, we introduced a motion to amend this bill. I hope the hon. member for St. Boniface will take it into account and not launch into another one of those dramatic speeches he makes every time he takes the floor in the House. I hope he will also try to improve this department where there is no openness whatsoever, but a great deal of patronage.

Mr. Duhamel: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comment a great deal. I realize that the hon. member is the official critic and that she was not always satisfied with the answers she received.

I realize also that she is not entirely right. We received a lot of information. It was sometimes difficult to understand it all, since there was so much of it.