

have to put up with over the next six weeks from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

• (1305)

A similar issue is pensions. Bloc members want out of the country but they sure do not want out of the pension plan. They are quite prepared to accept it.

To get back to the bill we are talking about today, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the bill to amend the Auditor General Act. I want to make clear from the outset that the Reform Party supports efforts that balance economic and environmental considerations to maintain a clean and healthy environment for future generations.

We are into the third session of the 35th Parliament. Yet to date the government has been visibly lacking in its environmental initiatives. A recent study by the National Centre for Economic Alternatives ranks Canada as the second worst in deterioration of land, air and water. We have seen little action from the minister to address this situation. We have heard plenty of rhetoric but have seen very little action to address key environmental concerns.

Bill C-83 is one of the very few initiatives the Minister of the Environment has announced and it is far from revolutionary. Bill C-83 amends the Auditor General Act to create the position of commissioner of the environment.

The commissioner of the environment was one of the initial undertakings of the standing committee. This bill comes to the House after a lengthy process of consultation with witnesses before being sent to the minister. During committee I listened with members on both sides of the House to witnesses who came forward with recommendations on what role and which responsibilities the new position of an environmental auditor general should take.

At the end of the hearings the recommendations were consolidated and I worked with members of the committee to sort out and weigh the various recommendations. We put together a standing committee report of recommendations which was then forwarded to the Minister of the Environment last year.

It was a long process of deliberation. I commend the many members and witnesses who contributed to the process. I am also pleased to say that for the most part the members of the standing committee on the environment were able to put aside partisan politics to work for a common goal: to establish the role of a commissioner of the environment.

Government Orders

It is unfortunate, however, when so much time, effort and expense goes into these studies and committee reports that the end result is barely acknowledged by the minister in the resultant legislation.

Representatives are flown in from all over the country at taxpayers' expense to present their concerns to the committee. One of the roles of standing committees is to listen to and consult with people on government initiatives and bills before the House, a role which has been widely abused by this and previous governments. It is unfortunate that the process of consultation under this government is somewhat meaningless.

Despite any decisions made by the parliamentary committee or any feedback from Canadians while the government is on the road supposedly consulting with people, the bottom line remains that decisions are still made behind closed doors at the whim of the cabinet. It is particularly disappointing to note that very little of Bill C-83 reflects what was contained in the recommendations of the parliamentary committee presented to the environment minister last year.

Why have a lengthy consultation process when the minister is going to ignore the results?

If the bill is representative of the minister's initiatives on the environment it speaks volumes. Members on both sides of the House proposed a number of excellent recommendations regarding the commissioner of the environment, most of which the minister chose to ignore in the bill.

When the Canadian public has had the opportunity to examine the bill they will conclude that it accomplishes particularly little to protect the environment. It is little wonder Canadians have criticized the minister for coming up short on her accomplishments. Clearly this legislation is not the answer to environmental concerns.

• (1310)

Canadians are waiting for the government to take charge and pass reasoned, meaningful legislation, not bills like this one which is completely lacking in substance and will do very little to change the status quo on environment.

It should be noted that the commissioner of the environment was not only a committee recommendation but also a Liberal red book election promise which the minister again fails to deliver.

The environment committee made several recommendations for the office of the commissioner of the environment, 17 in total. The Reform Party supported the initiative. Yet few of the committee recommendations have been followed through in the bill which barely resembles the intent of the parliamentary submission presented to the environment minister.

For example, the standing committee recommended that the office of the commissioner of the environment and sustainable