

**Mr. Andras:** In a very limited way.

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** I look forward to him and his colleagues supporting this motion because it is needed. The minister tried to tell us that the government is interested in the process of a comptroller general. Well, they had to be dragged kicking and screaming to it. I do not know whether the President of Treasury Board has noted it, but in the long list of priorities of this government for this session. Bill C-10 of last session which created the office, of Comptroller General does not appear. While the minister may give lip service to the idea, I would rather see the bill on the government's list of priorities.

The hon. member for Pontiac (Mr. Lefebvre) spoke about crown corporations. He said it will be difficult to decide whether to eliminate this Crown corporation, retain that one or change an objective. He is absolutely right. That is very important from the point of view of the operation of the government in a credible way. It is important from the point of view of the expenditure of public money. That kind of decision ought not to be made by a royal commission, commission of inquiry or task force. This country is overflowing with those.

As we see with the McDonald commission, once it is established, the people's representatives, the Parliament of Canada, and I guess even the Government of Canada, have no control over its function, speed or approach. It may become an excuse for government inaction. We have had enough of that.

This place, which is accountable in some way, given the expertise and advice that is available, is equipped to decide priorities and which programs should go ahead. After all, the people sent us here for that purpose. They sent all of us, no matter on which side we sit, to superintend and act as watchdogs over government expenditures.

The hon. member for Pontiac quite properly asked which agencies would be dealt with. There are some that are obvious, and the hon. member for Calgary Centre (Mr. Andre) set them forth. Also he set forth criteria for dealing with cases which may not be so obvious. Crown corporations are not accountable in any real sense. There is even difficulty in having their annual reports before committees. I believe such criteria should be in place. The government has stolen a number of suggestions in the past and I think they would do well to steal this one, too. Decisions should be made in public.

● (2112)

If parliament really was able to exercise any control over the establishment or operation of programs, would it have consented to embark upon the relocation program and have carried it out at the same time as the government was decentralizing? I do not think the hon. member for Ottawa West (Mr. Francis) would have been so silly as to consent to running those two programs in parallel. Parliament would have rebelled. The hon. member for Ottawa West has spoken out against the decentralization program. But he supports a government which has operated this program, one based upon the crass political motives, one which involves ministers of the Crown in the

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shabbiest patronage. Those are the kinds of decisions which, as he and I know, were made behind closed doors in the absence of studies and foisted—not by parliament, because parliament was never consulted—on the people of Canada.

Of course, a case can be made for decentralization, but certainly not for the way in which it was carried out in this instance. The hon. member for Ottawa West knows this. He has talked to people who have been affected by this policy; he has talked to administrators whose programs have been mucked up and whose lines of communication have been stretched beyond recognition. Can you imagine this parliament, Mr. Speaker, tolerating the way in which the status of women program has been handled, if it truly had a voice in it? I cannot imagine it being tolerated by the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt) if that were the case, or by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald). It has been a sham. But there is no channel through which the program can be effectively examined by parliament and all members know it.

A proposal for an ombudsman is before us; a white paper has been prepared by senior public servants. No input has been made by parliament, yet the people we represent are much affected by these proposals and legislation will be drawn up on the basis of the white paper. I think parliament is the place where these programs should be examined. Take the bilingual bonus program which is discriminatory, wasteful and wrong in principle. I do not think any parliament would have started that nonsense, let alone persisted in it as the government has done after making the decision behind closed doors.

What has been the effect of that program upon public servants? They have become demoralized. They feel put upon and discriminated against. The merit principle has been destroyed. Talk about regulations! Three thousand public servants, it turns out, have been placed improperly, recruited without any competition. If anything ought to be supervised by parliament it is this program.

There are some of us—and I am one—who think this place is not perfect. The government wants its legislation passed quickly and members of parliament want to be able to look at some of these programs. We have never been able to resolve these divergent points of view. But the committee proposed by the Leader of the Opposition would give us for the first time a parliamentary opportunity to consider these matters, as opposed to their being considered by a royal commission of inquiry. After all, they are of importance to each one of us as well as to the people we represent.

Parliament has to take one further step. There is not a member who can honestly say that our system of standing committees is adequate to the task of examining the estimates. That is why two years ago I made a proposal to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Organization on behalf of the Conservative party aimed at establishing an ongoing committee in which the programs and ongoing policies of government, as provided for in the estimates, could be examined. We could then take specific programs out of the estimates and consider them in depth, not against the guillotine at the end of the fiscal