

Public Service Performance

over the past six years. That document responds to a request made to my predecessor last May at a meeting of the miscellaneous estimates committee and shows the government's concern is not merely a by-product of the current spending restraint program. At last count, government activities involving some 166,000 public servants were covered by performance measurement systems—close to 39 per cent of all authorized man-years in the current fiscal year, and about two-thirds of the potential number of employees to which these systems could apply at their present stage of development. Moreover, 21 departments and agencies had sufficiently developed systems to present some performance data to the Treasury Board in support of their 1977-78 expenditure programs.

● (1530)

At the departmental level, performance indicators have been used by Health and Welfare Canada to monitor and reduce the unit cost of issuing family allowance and old age security payments, as well as payments made under the Canada Pension Plan. Similar indicators have been used by Revenue Canada to improve the effectiveness of excise tax audits, and by the National Capital Commission to manage more efficiently its maintenance operations. The document I tabled describes in considerable detail the performance measurement systems which are now well established in these administrative entities.

Much more remains to be done. In many departments and agencies measurement systems still have to be perfected before they can become a functional tool for public service managers. Research and experimentation is also needed before performance measurement can be systematically applied to activities which do not readily lend themselves to it, such as overhead operations like personnel or financial administration, or project-oriented activities like scientific research. More importantly, perhaps, it is essential that all federal public servants come to "think performance" as they discharge their prescribed duties. They must come to think more consistently of the Canadian public they serve, not only as the customers or clients for the public goods and services they help to produce, but also as the taxpayers who finance this production. This publication, which I also tabled earlier, is being distributed to all public service managers through their respective departments or agencies.

In concluding, Mr. Speaker, allow me to remind hon. members that in order to restrain government spending and curb the growth of the public service in a rational and socially progressive way, we must be able to measure the effectiveness with which public goods and services are currently delivered and the efficiency with which programs are administered, given their stated objectives. In other words, we must be able to determine how well the federal public service is meeting the challenge of delivering essential goods and services at an adequate level of quality and service but also at minimum cost. Indeed, knowledge of past and present performance is essential for devising and implementing future improvements. But in working toward these improvements we may soon have to

[Mr. Andras.]

make some hard choices between the cost of providing services and the quality of these services.

As long as there is some slack in the system, and as long as there are possibilities for further technological and managerial innovations, departments and agencies can continue to improve their efficiency while holding constant or even improving the quality of their services. However, as further increases in efficiency are sought, a point may be reached where further gains may be obtained only at the cost of lowering the quality of services to the Canadian public. I hardly need to point out that the decisions which we may have to make at this trade-off point between the efficiency and the quality of public services will be difficult ones, and reliable measures of performance will be of considerable assistance in arriving at the most acceptable solutions and in monitoring their impact on the general public.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, not even the most reliable measures of performance will ever be, nor should they be, mistaken for substitutes for sound administrative judgment and political common sense. These measures provide us with what, in the final analysis, statisticians call "index numbers"—data on the performance of ongoing operations which always referred to a point in time relative to an earlier period—which will enable public administrators and politicians to exercise judgment and common sense on the basis of more information. Performance indicators, Mr. Speaker, will never tell parliament or the government what should be the goals of our policies or programs, nor what are the most efficient and effective means of achieving these goals. But it has already been proven that performance measurement can greatly enlighten our relentless search for these elusive "best means", optimizing the welfare of all Canadians.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, it is customary to thank the minister, the President of the Treasury Board, who is to present a paper and for providing in advance a text of the comments he plans to make. This I do, as is expected. The advance notice was considerable, I might add. The material reached me about 11.30 this morning; but—and here I enter my caveat—I did not expect so much documentation, especially upon an esoteric subject such as servimetrics or performametrics, the measurement of the performance of a service which is presumably, but not certainly, a measure of productivity. The statement extended to three pages, which is about normal, but the minister also tabled a lengthier document of 10 pages with two appendices, one of 21 pages, the other of 13 pages to which was attached a further appendix of several pages.

Mr. Andras: You are damned if you do, and damned if you don't!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Order.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): That is right. It might have served everyone's purpose better if appendix B, at least, the instructions to deputy ministers sent round to departments and agencies, had been released at the time of its circulation so