

Sunset Laws

I do not think it is necessary to go into the mechanics or major elements of the bill because I spelled these out in some detail last February. In addition, I believe the bill itself is clear and relatively straightforward, and for this I owe a vote of thanks to the parliamentary counsel's office for its help and advice. However, there are two points I think should be made and perhaps dealt with at least briefly at this time.

● (1610)

First, the schedules attached to the bill are designed as a suggested format or timetable, if you will, for carrying out the mandatory review of existing programs and agencies. It may be decided that the committee, which I have suggested should carry out such a review, would be in a better position to establish such a timetable. If so, I am sure that would be more than acceptable to the concept and principles we have before us for consideration now.

The second point of clarification pertains to the need for competent support staff assigned to the committee to assist it in undertaking the broad based evaluation of programs and agencies which is necessary. Because of the restrictions on private members' legislation I could not write this very important and absolutely necessary feature into my bill. As you know, we are not allowed to suggest the spending or the raising of money. However, if this House is to adopt the sunset concept, then the designated committee or procedure, whatever, must be properly equipped to do the job.

In this context I recognize there are many people who suggest the job of reviewing each and every program and agency of government might in itself create an enormous bureaucratic burden. We will not know that unless we try. Program evaluation as such has not been seen in my experience to bring an end to existing programs within this government, programs that are no longer fulfilling or meeting the reason for their establishment in the first place.

As the size of government increases, so increases the amount and the level of mandatory funding. Administrative costs escalate, and there is a decrease in the amount of money available for new purposes and new needs. This is particularly true in a growing and expanding country such as Canada with the many geographically related problems we face. The type of legislation which I propose is a means to balance funds allocated for agencies or programs established years ago with new needs and new priorities facing Canada in the 1970s and 1980s.

As money grows more and more scarce, essential programs and services must be run more economically and efficiently. The sunset process could provide a way to ensure the greatest control of and accountability for all public funds.

However, sunset legislation should not be viewed as merely the means of cutting or reducing government spending. Though certainly one of the goals of this approach and of this form of legislation, that is not the sole objective. Equally as important is the need to make government again truly answerable to the people of this country. Canadians are understandably beginning to feel that they are becoming the servants and

not the beneficiaries of our form of government. Perhaps this feeling is strongest at this time of year when we are forced to undergo that unique Canadian form of water torture known as filing your income tax return. It is not just tax forms, it is the broad gamut of government, which has become so complex, that it has forced us to create additional offices simply to explain to Canadians where they can obtain assistance and understanding of the functions and roles of agencies and programs being undertaken by the government.

As my esteemed and very distinguished colleague, the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. Stanfield), has said, perhaps it is too late for us to regain control of the machinery of government and its complexity. I differ with him to this degree; I do not think it is too late for us to try. He may be right, but I hope not.

The government has complicated the life of the small businessman to such an extent it has had to create a special office for the "reduction of paper burden". My secretary has on her phone a piece of paper which says "If you do not understand it, call me and we will tell you." This is an office to explain paper burden. Good God, what are we coming to? This office even supplies little red stickers with its telephone number that can be stuck on the phone for quick reference. Can you imagine this paper burden number stuck there on the telephone beside other emergency numbers for the police, the fire department, the ambulance and so on?

An hon. Member: They have the biggest Xerox machine imaginable.

Mr. Forrestall: The biggest Xerox machine in the world could not keep up with this. We are in some degree of trouble when we reach this stage. Just to illustrate for a moment or two, let me refer to the fact that one of the reasons for the establishment of PetroCan was to create an agency of government that could deal with the governments of other countries for the express purpose of obtaining crude oil and its delivery. As you know, this country is not secure in its oil supply for reasons that are totally inexplicable. We are told on the one hand by one industry that we have generations of self-sufficiency but we do not have a distribution system. Millions of people living east of this Ottawa Valley where we are sitting today are at the whim of foreign nationals in respect of security of home heating fuels and gasoline. This year we will pay close to \$4 billion to foreign-controlled cartels to move our trade goods into this country and our exports out, all of which is totally out of our control.

PetroCan has not secured one gallon of oil for the people of eastern Canada since its establishment. Good God, that was what it was established for. I am suggesting, not in any forceful way, that PetroCan should be thrown out the window. I think it should be dismantled or, if it is not, it should work for the purpose for which it was brought into being, and that is to secure oil deliveries to eastern Canadian refineries. I just mention this as a typical example. Had PetroCan been under the scrutiny of a competent standing committee of this House, whose purpose and function it was to review its role,