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EMPLOYMENT—CLARIFICATION OF PROVISIONS OF OUTREACH PROGRAM

Mr. Rob Parker (Eglinton): Mr. Speaker, my concern tonight is a question which I asked of the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) on last Thursday. It arose in a committee hearing at which the question of the outreach projects and their evaluation was being discussed, particularly the question as to why the evaluation of those projects could not be made public.

In answer to a question asked by an hon. member of the New Democratic Party, the minister said that there may be some situation where they do an evaluation of the project and find that somebody in charge of it is a hopeless alcoholic or a drug addict or they have a problem at home, or God knows what else. Also he indicated that they did not want to make that kind of information public. The sentiment on the part of the minister seemed quite clear in his answer. At the time it took some 90 people who worked for Outreach programs across the country—and there are 22 such programs—and put them all in the same bag. It made them all subject to the possibility that their projects were not being evaluated in a public way because they were drug addicts or alcoholics.

I asked a question of the minister. He said that there may be some situations. I was not asking him to make all evaluations public. I was asking him to clarify whether he was referring to all of the employees, all of the project managers, or only some of them. I received representations in my office, as I am sure a number of other members did, from the employees or people who were working on those Outreach programs. They wondered why they were singled out to be slurred with this type of allegation by the minister. His answer was simply to explain what was quite clear from his original statement, that they did not want to make personal information public. We understand that on this side of the House.

Perhaps there are occasions when personal information in a memorandum may be embarrassing to someone if released. We would never make anything public, or want it made public, when it is embarrassing to a private individual. If it is embarrassing to someone in the House, that is a slightly different case. We understand the concern the minister had. What we do not understand is why he refuses to make those evaluations public in the face of what is a perfectly reasonable request. Hopefully tonight will give the minister or his representative a chance to put that wrong right and to admit there is a valid principle of privacy, but you do not have to extend it to all 90 people.

● (2212)

We wonder whether the reluctance to release that kind of information is perhaps because in the process of the budget cuts that were announced during August the government has been cutting programs without regard for their efficiency or effectiveness. We wonder whether the evaluations that are so

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secret for these allegedly personal reasons are being kept secret because they reveal that these programs operated by volunteers have in fact been more effective than programs operated under the direct control of the minister.

There is suspicion on this side of the House, as well as outside the House, that many of these cutbacks being talked about in such broad terms are a sham and that where the cutbacks are real they are being implemented in a very sudden, unplanned and ad hoc way, and that projects which are more efficient than those of agencies directly under the control of a variety of ministers in the government are being cut back without public reasons being given because it would be embarrassing to the ministers involved to have that fact revealed, that volunteers working on their own for low pay, with poor resources, can achieve a higher level of accomplishment than the vast bureaucracy run by this government.

Let me quote from a presentation prepared by some of the Outreach people backing up that point. They said:

In response to a question posed in the House of Commons, Bud Cullen justified the elimination of women as an Outreach target group on the basis of "16 or 17" other programs which his ministry has set up to help women.

That has reference to the ministry of unemployment and immigration. I suppose I should say "employment and immigration", to be formally correct.

The quotation continues as follows:

In fact, there are no other services which fill the needs that Outreach programs address. Mr. Cullen did not specify the programs he had in mind, and employees in his department were unable to name 16 or 17 other services that are directed toward women. Programs which do exist to serve women, while useful, do not deal with the client volume served by Outreach projects. In Ottawa, for example, two major C.E.C. women's courses . . . respectively served 16 and 18 clients last year, compared to 600 served by the three counsellors at the Ottawa women's Outreach program. Similar ratios apply to Toronto and London.

This whole evaluation process is being kept very secret. The people who run the programs are not being consulted. They do not know how they are being assessed. They do not know what the results of those assessments are. All they know is that the minister justifies his refusal to make those assessments public by saying that some of the people who manage the programs might be drunks or dope addicts. I think that is an inexcusable refusal to provide information on how well the programs have gone.

We sympathize with the government's desire to cut back. We feel it is necessary to cut back on the amount the government is and has been spending, but if the government is doing it in this way without any public assessment of programs, and without any ability of people to compare the assessments that are being made, and to say then that this is a justified cutback, and that is a justified cutback, and this is an unjustified cutback, is not acceptable. There may be cases where very valuable programs have to be cut. We are certainly never going to know, if this is the kind of process the government follows. We are certainly never going to know, if ministers of the Crown give this kind of answer to serious questions when the reputations of very dedicated volunteers have been impugned in this House or in committees of this House.