

ans, are a basically selfish people and that we only look at measures which have the capacity to affect us directly. What chance of survival would some of our environmental programs have had, for example, had they been subject to sunset legislation? Under the economic crunch of the last year or two many good programs brought in a decade ago might have fallen by the wayside.

I am sympathetic to the concept of this legislation. It is not new and it is not without redeeming qualities. I believe, however, that it requires more research to determine the benefits and the liabilities, to judge the effects on worth-while programs now in place, and to evaluate whether this is the best approach to dealing with the problem of programs that have outlived their usefulness.

In point of fact, some of the mechanisms to deal with these very questions are already in place. The government, through the expanded role of the Auditor General and through the work of the Comptroller General, has procedures that can be used to measure the effectiveness of various programs. And this government has a reasonably good history of phasing out programs that have outlived their effectiveness or replacing them with new ones that more directly meet the needs of Canadians.

Some recent examples come readily to mind. The Anti-Inflation Board is being wrapped up, with the continuing part of its program going to another agency where fewer people with a different mandate can do the job. The Neighborhood Improvement Program and the Bank Act are examples where termination was an integral part of the over-all plans. Further, there was a reiteration in the Speech from the Throne of the government's intention to ensure that a close watch on its myriad projects was being kept and to transfer certain programs to the private sector where appropriate. The government also made a commitment to provide parliament with the opportunity to review evaluations of major programs which ensures that hon. members have an on-going opportunity to be part of a review process.

But this is on a selective basis. There isn't the pressure to which I alluded earlier where every program would have to be reviewed. Parliament can build its review into the continuing work of hon. members, filling the dual need for selectivity and for making the review process a viable opportunity.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I see an admitted need for an orderly, systematic review of government programs. There are

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some programs which have outlived or will outlive their effectiveness. However, the government has procedures to ferret out those programs whose effectiveness is open to question, and it has procedures for eliminating those no longer necessary.

I believe members of parliament themselves have, as a major function, the task of directing attention to government programs which they believe need to be removed or improved. The bill identifies a genuine problem. Many of us share the concerns of the hon. member who has brought this measure forward, but I am afraid that a general application of the sunset principle would be too all-embracing. If I might play a little with the word "sunset", I am afraid this kind of a sunset law may indeed lead to a nightmare.

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say at the outset that in putting forward this bill the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall) is certainly responding to a deeply held belief among the public, which is that governments should do more and be less. There is concern about the inflationary effects of over-regulation and that the heavy hand of government might limit enterprise and innovation, but while I am sympathetic to the hon. member's wish for greater efficiency and more care about the expenditure of tax dollars, I share the concerns which have been expressed by my colleagues, the hon. member for Bonaventure-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (Mr. Béchard) and the hon. member for York West (Mr. Fleming), about the particular method proposed.

● (1700)

There is a lack of flexibility because sunset legislation requires that every program and every department be reviewed on specific dates and times, even if everyone agrees that they are operating effectively, and the more programs which have to be reviewed, the less likely it is that there will be in-depth examinations.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order. The hour provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. It being five o'clock, this House stands adjourned until Monday at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 2(1).

At 5 p.m. the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Standing Order.