

Government of Canada

The value of reports is substantial, substantially influenced by their early availability. The timeliness of reports is so important that Departments should make every effort to publish their reports as early as possible in the new financial year.

Although departmental reports are first and foremost accounts of internal administration, they should seek to address for the public the basic purpose of answering, what we are, what we do, who does it, and how well we perform. The basics of public accountability would be served if such questions were answered in departmental reports.

I have a section here from the Auditor's General's Office. It is on value for money auditing. It is an excellent document for all Members to read to show what the Auditor General is attempting to achieve.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take a few minutes to speak in support of the motion put forward by the Hon. Member for York East (Mr. Redway). I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate him for his contribution and for his work on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[*English*]

Some years ago the Auditor General and his predecessors began to do their work for us in the House of Commons. They made a more uniform system of reporting some of the financial information. That has been very useful in terms of compiling numbers and expenditures of various government Departments, and some Crown corporations and agencies of the Government.

However, in our quest to standardize some of those procedures, perhaps we have overlooked another area that has to be far more uniform and standardized, and an area that we need to make more accessible not only to Members of Parliament but also to the general public. That area is the area of annual reports of the various government Departments, corporations, boards, agencies, and so on.

Hardly a day passes that a Member of Parliament does not receive an annual report of some sort in his or her office. As you will know, Mr. Speaker, there are days in which we actually get stacks of them coming from all over the place, including corporations of the Government, and also private corporations that are proud of their achievements and want to send Members of Parliament of all stripes their annual reports in order to highlight what it is they have done during the previous fiscal year. Sometimes those reports are interesting. Perhaps I am the exception, but I do not read every single one of those reports. Possibly other Members do, but we do try to read or glance over the ones that are important and informative to us.

As a Member of Parliament from a largely rural constituency, I represent probably a greater number of dairy farmers than anyone else in the House. One report that I always read

from cover to cover is the annual report of the Canadian Dairy Commission. I find that the information contained in that report is indeed useful to me in representing my constituents.

This particular report contains everything, such as the cost of production formula that is utilized by the commission in establishing the revenues that will be generated to farmers, and so on. It talks about the importation of cheese into this country. It talks about the subsidies paid. It talks about the production of industrial milk versus fluid milk, and everything else Hon. Members would want to know about the operations of this particular commission.

• (1750)

In my opinion it is generally well prepared, well presented, and attractive to read and to view. It has a few pictures, not 14 eight-by-ten glossies of the Minister or anything excessive like that. However, it is well balanced and has the audited financial statements appended to the document in question. It is really a very useful tool. It is probably not perfect. I suppose none of them are, but at least it is interesting.

Sometimes other annual reports that we see have so little information that we actually wonder why anyone bothered to put them out. Others are so complex that they are virtual encyclopaedias of how the government Departments in question work.

Obviously what we need is a more standard formula, not one which is identical, because what is good for the Canadian Dairy Commission is not necessarily what is important for the Canada Lands Company, to use another corporation with which I have some familiarity. These two corporations or agencies operate very differently, and the procedures they use should probably not be identical. Nevertheless, there should be a standard form by which, if a parliamentarian or anyone else opens up one of these documents, he will know what it is. The first thing he is presented with is the letter by the Minister presenting his or her report. The second thing is the board of directors of the corporation, followed by the audited statements, the operations, and so on. Someone picking up one of these documents should be able to see at a glance what happens.

Another matter of interest to me—and I am not sure how it would be realized; but I am expressing the view nevertheless—is that there should be a standard or more uniform time of reporting for some of these corporations. Some of them operate on the government fiscal year, others operate on the calendar year, and some operate on scattered fiscal years in a way similar to that of private companies. Because they are all Crown corporations or agencies of the Crown in one way or another, we should at least make uniform, or a little more uniform, the time in which they are called upon to report. If that is deemed to be a serious overload on the system, perhaps we could have a number of them reporting on March 31 and a number of them reporting in September, October, or whenever. That would ensure that 90 days or 120 days after the end