Private Members' Business

The government needs to retain flexibility in this regard. Cyclical evaluations of singular statutory programs may not always provide the wider information base needed for a significant government decision. There is nothing wrong with supporting cyclical evaluation. One needs to think whether this approach is the best one in all cases.

Ultimately we want to ensure review of activities undertaken by government departments and central agencies are better linked to government priorities rather than some predetermined schedule.

[*Translation*]

The needs and aspirations of the population change rapidly. Unforeseen problems may arise. Decision makers and managers must adapt quickly to any change in conditions.

[*English*]

A long term fixed evaluation schedule is not always appropriate. Programs should be evaluated based on an analysis of risk, their importance to Canadians and, as the information is needed, for decision making. To have an evaluation for the sake of an evaluation is not cost effective or wise.

Evaluations are not the only source of information parliamentarians and Canadians can use to evaluate whether government programs and services are affordable and effective. There are many different activities in government which help us to learn how well programs are serving Canadians and also to identify successful practices that can lead to service and quality improvements when needed.

Earlier this week the President of the Treasury Board released details of the renewed expenditure management system of the Government of Canada. The new system is intended to support the objective of making the best use of tax dollars to deliver quality services to Canadians. The renewed expenditure management system introduced the concept of departmental outlooks. These outlooks on program priorities and expenditures will be provided to the various standing committees of the House.

[*Translation*]

These documents will give parliamentary committees better quality information that will enable them to evaluate future priorities and trends in departmental and program spending and to comment on them.

[*English*]

The public service is currently working to establish service standards for its programs. The role of service standards is to provide answers to questions such as how long will it take to provide a service? How often will it be provided? What can people do if they are not satisfied? Providing service standards that pose these types of questions invite public feedback. This feedback from the clients of government is an important element in the government's attempt to provide quality services that are affordable, efficient, effective and responsive to the needs of Canadians.

● (1750)

Internal audit is another important tool available to provide information on the success of programs and activities. Internal audits are designed to help managers achieve their business objectives by identifying weaknesses or opportunities to improve the overall economy, efficiency and effectiveness of program management practices.

[*Translation*]

It is also important to note that the information on program performance must be available on an ongoing basis. Managers, members of Parliament and senators along with the Canadian people would not be very happy to learn long after the fact that the programs have not produced the expected results.

[*English*]

There must be useful performance measures that provide answers on an ongoing basis. The Auditor General has for several years encouraged the government to improve the quality of the information in this area. Program managers must be encouraged to demonstrate on a timely basis the results being achieved by their programs.

Most of the mechanisms for providing information on program performance, what I have discussed already, have a permanent place in the management framework of government and are already used to assess statutory programs.

[*Translation*]

I have tried to demonstrate that, even if evaluation is an important management tool, it is not the only one. No single tool such as evaluation can meet all information needs that determine program effectiveness. Each review tool and each information tool must be used at the appropriate time and for the appropriate purposes.

[*English*]

I have tried to demonstrate the most important aspects of what is happening in government in terms of relating information to parliamentarians. The House recently passed a private member's bill that changed the Auditor General's act to allow him to report more frequently to the House. This change will provide us again with more timely information on government activities and I am sure it will provide the Auditor General with more work.

How much more work can we be asking the Auditor General to do before we start to reduce his effectiveness? That is one of the problems we would encounter.