

*Private Members' Business*

My bill will require each program evaluation be laid before the House and referred to a standing committee for its input, for public discussion, hearings and for recommendations. It would be a public process.

We have program reviews going on today with the Minister of Human Resources Development. These reviews are taking place behind the scenes. They are being presented, according to the Auditor General, without pooled information. In his last report he mentioned we would require more information. It would be a public process and the government would be required to respond to the committee's report within 150 days.

Another major point is we must have faith in the quality of the evaluations. For that reason my bill causes evaluations on programs that spend more than \$250 million annually to be reviewed by the Auditor General, and his report on the evaluation to be laid before the House also.

Program evaluation is an idea whose time has come. The Auditor General has been critical of the progress of development of program evaluation in his 1993 report. Program evaluation has been introduced in other western democracies with significant success and savings to the taxpayer. It can, will and must do the same here.

As parliamentarians who are wrestling with a serious budget deficit and an accumulated debt almost out of control, we owe it to the taxpayers to adopt program evaluation. As members of Parliament responsible for the public purse, program evaluation is without doubt the best tool that has come along to assist us in our work in decades.

The Auditor General said: "The story of program evaluation in the Government of Canada is one of high expectations and great potential that have only been partly fulfilled". That quote is from the 1993 Auditor General's report, paragraph 844.

Let us not have heads of gold and feet of clay. Let program evaluation achieve its full potential in playing its very real and substantial role in managing government programs.

**Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address the House on Bill C-289, a private member's bill.

The bill provides for the regular evaluation of continuing government programs funded by statutory appropriations by a program evaluation process set by the President of the Treasury Board. Responsible ministers would be required to table in the House the results of these evaluations.

[Translation]

The bill also requires the Auditor General of Canada to review and report to the House of Commons on major evaluations.

[English]

During this period of concern for the deficit and the level of the national debt, it is very important all parliamentarians and all Canadians know which government programs are working; which government programs are working well and which ones are not working well. We also want to know how we can improve them so they are affordable and that they meet the objectives established for them.

Program evaluation is a good tool for reviewing programs. It allows for the questioning on a periodic basis of the rationale for each government program. It involves the systematic gathering of verifiable information on a program. This information would include demonstrable evidence of its results and cost effectiveness. This process would provide more and better information for decision making.

• (1745)

The government has already demonstrated its commitment to the need for regular program evaluations. Many of our public documents place an important focus on evaluation. For example, "Creating Opportunities", the red book, outlines the importance of evaluation information and the 1994 budget called for major reviews of federal programs.

[Translation]

These important reviews of federal programs had two objectives: first, to identify the programs and services that the government will continue to provide if there are enough resources and, second, to ensure that these programs are delivered in the most efficient way possible. We can already see the results of these reviews.

[English]

In addition, in May 1994 the Treasury Board approved a new review policy. The intent was to strengthen the ongoing review capabilities of departments and the government in general. More and improved review and evaluation findings are to be made publicly available.

Bill C-289 recommends evaluations be made of statutory programs on a cyclical basis. This a worthy approach. We need to ask how practical it is. There are only so many resources that can be devoted to program evaluation. We must use those resources carefully.

While major statutory programs are important, sometimes it is much more cost effective to evaluate issues which impact on more than one program and possibly on more than one department. Evaluations involving many departments are often more strategic and more likely to be useful.