

Private Members' Business

they read them and decide for themselves. I would be delighted to chat with them about it if they want more information.

As members know, a steady flow of reports come to us from the government departments, agencies and crown corporations on their activities, their accomplishments and their plans. I find them exceptionally useful as a member of Parliament, particularly those agencies and institutions that are of interest to me.

Finally, I want to focus on the departmental program evaluation and internal audit programs. To my way of thinking, they have not received the visibility they deserve. Some will know I was a former deputy minister and had access to internal audit reports and to program audits. I found them extremely useful.

During the course of the year, we had an opportunity to sit down and look at those with a team of colleagues and try to decide what it was that was working, what it was that was not working and what it was we could do to change our direction in order to meet not only financial obligations but others as well.

I want to quote something useful with respect to the internal audit. By the way this comes from the Auditor General. It goes like this: "The internal audit has the potential to contribute greatly to improving management practices. The government is looking to internal audit to play a vital role in providing assurance on management systems and practices and in addressing re-engineering productivity and government issues".

• (1420)

My view is, actually it is one that has been communicated by the Auditor General, that the internal audit has a tremendous potential to help us all manage government more effectively and to reach the targets that we have set for ourselves either as a government or collectively as parliamentarians.

I want to point out as well that the program evaluation data has a lot of potential because it provides information and analysis for government managers on the results which government programs are producing. It finds innovative and less costly ways of serving Canadians. I think we have all talked about that.

Apparently, this is something that should be noted because we are not often willing, I think we do not do it often enough—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The time has expired.

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to address the House on Bill C-207, an act to amend the Auditor General, proposed by the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

This bill will among other things allow the Auditor General to report to Parliament on various matters of interest throughout the course of a year. Under these proposals the Auditor General would have the opportunity to bring his reports to the attention of parliamentarians as his work on a particular audit is completed or he could report to Parliament at a time he judged

appropriate on matters of urgency or pressing importance. He would no longer be limited to one annual report.

These are most interesting and constructive ideas. They are not new concepts. I know that the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier proposed them in the previous government and I believe deserve thorough consideration.

However as part of our study of these proposals I believe it is important to review carefully the existing system: what are its basic precepts, how is it working, does it allow the House to benefit to the fullest extent possible from the work of the Auditor General and his staff?

First let us examine the current system and how it is functioning. Currently legislation requires the Auditor General to audit the accounts of Canada, including those related to the Consolidate Revenue Fund and to report annually to Parliament on his findings.

This annual report relates to the publication every year of the public accounts. It facilitates consideration of these accounts by Parliament which of course also operates on an annual expenditure cycle. This procedure ensures regularity in the reporting process. It makes it possible to compare one year's performance with the next.

Once tabled in the House the annual report is then examined in detail by the public accounts committee. This committee, chaired by a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, looks closely at the issues raised each year by Mr. Desautels and his staff. The committee members look carefully at how government departments and agencies are running, respond to the Auditor General's suggestions for improvements, his request for information from Parliament and for the public.

They call before them senior officials of government departments. When their work is complete the committee gives the government the benefit of its findings.

[*Translation*]

I agree with the member for Ottawa—Vanier who believes that the Auditor General's role and responsibilities are of a paramount importance for MPs and senators, for the government and the Canadian people. Moreover, I am convinced that the present system is a good one.

[*English*]

This year's report is a case in point. The Auditor General and his staff made a valuable contribution to a better understanding of the many complex issues faced by government. When this year's report was tabled in February it quickly became clear that the government shared many of the Auditor General's preoccupations. I am pleased to report that we have already acted on and publicly set out our plans for addressing many of the areas of concern that he highlighted: more information for Parliament