

*Public Accounts*

originally estimated to be expended. It was felt that only by expressing the estimates in constant and current dollars could any intelligent analysis be made of whether the project was being handled efficiently or not.

There was another section of this first report which dealt with program evaluation and there were three recommendations there. The first was that the government give high priority to evaluation work, that the positions currently authorized for planning and evaluation functions be devoted more to program evaluation, and that over a period of five years equal emphasis and effort be given to effectiveness evaluation and planning. That was expanded on a little bit in paragraph 23 of the report, as follows:

—in 1975, approximately 3,500 person-years were identified with the "Planning and Evaluation" function—

You would think that 3,500 people were enough to get proper planning and evaluation, but that number of 3,500 included 267 senior executive positions. Unfortunately, the testimony also revealed that, among 23 departments, only 131 person-years were devoted to program evaluation, and 62 of those person-years were in one department. Hence the recommendation, Mr. Speaker.

The second recommendation on program evaluation was that technical reports of effectiveness evaluation be available for critical review and comment, and in particular the committee encourages review in learned journals in order to focus the informed commentary of the academic community on the technology of evaluation research.

I do not feel as competent as some other members of the committee to comment on the critical review and the technical jargon in some of the evaluation reports, but I will allow that recommendation to stand on its own.

The third and last one in the program evaluation section was that recipients of program funds be required to execute an agreement stating that they will comply with reasonable requests for information for purposes of evaluation research.

That was to overcome problems of non-co-operation. The Auditor General and the government in fact found that many bodies that got grants were unwilling to co-operate to provide information that evaluation people needed when it came time to try to evaluate the programs and to see whether one should in fact be spending money in that way.

Probably the most important of the recommendations is the one contained in this paragraph, and that is that the committee requests that the government respond to the recommendations in this report by March 31, 1981, in order that Parliament be informed of developments in the accountability process of the government to Parliament. If we cannot get responsibility and accountability back into the House of Commons, there is no way that the members who are elected to look after business affairs for the taxpayers are going to be able to do their job properly.

This report was tabled in July of 1980 and a response in something like eight and one-half months was requested. We did have a response, to be fair, but we have not had the action

that we need, in spite of statements by the President of the Treasury Board on behalf of the government that action was taking place, and in spite of letters to me. I want to read a couple of paragraphs of what the minister said. First of all, in 1980, referring to this very report of the standing committee tabled in the House on July 18, 1980, the minister said this:

● (1440)

I have discussed its contents with my officials both in the Treasury Board and in the Office of the Comptroller General, and I am pleased to say that we consider the committee's recommendations positive and helpful. Moreover, as President of the Treasury Board, I find it gratifying to see the committee's explicit recognition of our collective concern for improved management processes.

Perhaps the minister has been in his portfolio for too long, because it is nearly two years since he wrote that. At the time he wrote it he was very intimately familiar with the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and what it had recommended or was going to recommend, as well as with what the committee had heard during his tenure as chairman. In that same letter he went on to say:

It has always been my view, and it still is, that consideration of cost over-runs falls properly within the jurisdiction of the Public Accounts Committee.

It is nice to hear that from the minister. In that same paragraph he continues:

I have been concerned, however, and I still am, that by virtue of its linkage to the Auditor General's report, much of the committee's information deals mainly with the past.

I have already dealt with that complaint. He goes on:

I do, therefore, support efforts to provide more current information to parliamentarians on the matter of project management, with a view to strengthening existing methods of parliamentary scrutiny and control.

In this letter the minister stated in black and white nearly two years ago that he agrees with all the recommendations. But something has happened. The minister may have lost his power, interest or influence—we do not know—but we are not getting the results. That is why it is so important that the House consider this report today.

Lest members opposite think that I am overstating the case of the interest of the minister, I would read two sentences from another letter that the minister wrote to me as chairman on February 6, 1981. That was four months after the first letter I referred to. We had filed our second report to the House by then. In this letter he said:

—I want to assure you of Treasury Board's continuing interest in the efforts of your committee by initiating an approach to regularize our response to PAC reports.

In other words, he is going to write me to thank me and say what a nice job the committee has done every time we file a report. He goes on to say this, which I think is a telling sentence:

Although I cannot view the second report of the PAC as a positive and helpful contribution as I did the first report, I want to assure you of Treasury Board's continuing interest in the recommendations which your committee makes to Parliament.

In other words, the minister is paying lip service to the recommendations in the second report, although he indicates