

*Private Members' Business*

Over the last 10 to 15 years the private sector has realized technology has changed the world, that profit margins are slimmer. Efficiency must be improved to maintain profitability. Innovation is the only way to success.

By recognizing these signs and acting on them, Canadian industry leads the world today in rising productivity growth. To them we owe a great debt of gratitude. If they had been as laggardly and as slothful as the Government of Canada, the country would have had a financial crisis long ago.

The private sector is constantly reviewing what it does, how well it does it, how it can improve efficiency and how it can innovate. Is the government exempt from these issues? The answer is no. It does not have the political will to address them.

My private members' bill is a serious attempt to redress that problem. I have focused on statutory spending in my private members' bill, spending that accounts for \$112 billion this fiscal year. It is included in the estimates for information only.

Members of Parliament cannot debate it. They cannot vote on it. They cannot reduce it. They cannot eliminate it. Like old man river, it keeps rolling on every day. I want to take stock of that \$112 billion of spending.

Like the private sector, I want it done rationally, completely, objectively and most of all on a cyclical basis of seven to ten years.

• (1735)

I am proposing in my private member's bill that all statutory spending, no matter how great or small, how meaningful or meaningless, be evaluated every decade using four fundamental principles. Is the program still relevant? Is the program effective in addressing the needs that have been identified? Is the program being delivered efficiently? Is there a better way to achieve the same results? Those are four fundamental criteria on which to evaluate every statutory program that has been authorized by the Government of Canada over the years.

Let us look at these points again. Is the program relevant? We all know we live in a changing society. Statistics Canada is continually measuring these changes in our society, the size of urban poor, child poverty, wealth, the size of our houses, the products we buy, the appliances we own, our level of education. The index of Statistics Canada is an inch thick. Who says a program designed 20 or 30 years ago is meeting the challenges of today unless we ask what is the challenge we are trying to meet today?

Therefore I want the question asked whether the program is still relevant. That will cause the senior bureaucrats and the political masters to define clearly and specifically what the need

is in today's terms, not last year's terms or last decade's terms. What are they trying to accomplish today? It is simple enough. The private sector does it all the time. It boggles my mind that this is an innovative idea for the Government of Canada.

The second principle of evaluation is whether the program is effective in addressing the identified need. That again seems a fairly simple question to which we would want to know the answer. Surely if we have identified a need through the discussion on relevancy it behoves us to know we are addressing that need effectively, not just 60 per cent of the need being addressed and 40 per cent being ignored or whatever percentage we want to choose.

On the other side of the coin, why would we want to address a need with 20 per cent overlap beyond that? We would be wasting taxpayers' money because we did not examine our programs to determine if they are effective. Worst of all, what would we say if we were to find that a program is addressing issues largely irrelevant to the fundamental focus of the programs, spending money with abandon while the need identified remains unaddressed?

Surely it is our job as parliamentarians to be asking these questions to ensure on behalf of taxpayers that we have the answers.

The third principle of my bill requires that we ask how efficiently we are delivering these programs. Is our service up to par or do we have to wait months for a disability pension from CPP, for example? I found out through my work on the public accounts committee that the Canada pension plan only answers four out of every 11 telephone calls. I found out that the Department of National Defence built a warehouse in Halifax to house inventory. However, after the building was largely complete it looked at the inventory it wanted to put into the building and realized it was largely obsolete and was not being used.

Therefore, when we ask whether the program is being delivered efficiently, I hope in most cases the answer is yes. We want to know every situation when the answer is no.

• (1740)

The final principle of the bill asks the simple yet fundamental question is there a better way? Too often we get caught up in repetition instead of innovation. As needs change we have new tools and new technology to identify needs. As we improve our efficiency we should always ask whether there is a better way.

Preventive maintenance goes a long way to reduce renovation. A stitch in time saves nine. Program evaluation, as proposed in my private member's bill, is an ongoing process that will provide value to the Canadian taxpayer. It is not politically driven. It is open and transparent.