

Supply

Are we not, as members of this House, the most suitable and accessible group if committees want to consult anyone? That makes all the difference. As for the public accounts committee, its actual mandate is simply to check on certain elements. It does not analyze thoroughly the Auditor General's report or recommendations. We would only have to determine the exact difference between that committee and the new one which would look especially at expenditures. I would like to know the member's opinion on the motion of the Bloc Quebecois.

• (1235)

Mrs. Catterall: Mr. Speaker, I would certainly like to make a comment.

I hope the member opposite recognizes that the motion deals directly with the importance of information, efficiency and effectiveness. The information I provided this House today in my speech deals exactly with those issues. The government is already implementing measures to improve information, efficiency and effectiveness so that the very point of the motion is taken care of and so that we may improve the ability of this House, its members and committees to make better decisions in the best interests of the public, the financial situation and the future of this country.

Mr. Gaston Leroux (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, as you know, as a political Party, the Bloc Quebecois, has committed itself to defend the interests of Quebec and, as the Official Opposition, it has committed itself to responsibly and effectively assume this role.

In this context, I want you to be assured, Mr. Speaker, that we are going to make constant, accurate and regular efforts to see that this government abides by the commitments made in its famous red book.

With regard to this debate on the creation of a special committee with a mandate to evaluate the various programs, I would like to highlight some deficiencies of the Canadian federal system which are at the root of the poor management of this country and of its financial crisis. I refer in particular to the shortcomings of the evaluation process as applied to government programs.

Given the weakness of this mechanism which allows to systematically verify in each department the efficiency and the viability of government programs—the legacy of the Trudeau and the Mulroney eras—the Bloc Quebecois wants to proceed to a detailed evaluation of the government spending programs.

In our view, program evaluation must meet three basic needs of any administration which has self-respect and knows how to efficiently defend itself. First, the information collected through such evaluation measures is used for clarifying the decision making process regarding the allocation of resources, making it more efficient. Second, these measures help Quebecers and Canadians to decide on the return from tax revenues. Finally, such measures make civil servants responsible not only

for the implementation of the procedures, but also for the results achieved.

At present, the Treasury Board policy on evaluation consists of two elements. A self-evaluation made by the departments and a process directed by a central authority which has the mandate to establish priorities, provide technical assistance and monitor the evaluations made by departments. Therefore, evaluations are already being made by some departments but the monitoring part is far from brilliant.

There are two main problems related to program evaluation in Canada. First, the resources allotted to a department to make such evaluations and thus increase the return on public investments are clearly insufficient.

Let me give some examples which speak for themselves. Between 1989–90 and 1991–92, the expenditures related to program evaluations went down 28 per cent which, as a result, has led to a reduction in the number of program evaluations since 1987–88. Indeed, 99 program evaluation reports were produced in 1987–88 compared to only 80 in 1991–92. Most importantly, during the latter period, government expenditures for 16 programs totalled \$124.5 billion. Only two of those programs were examined thoroughly. By the way, the Trudeau and Mulroney administrations never gave any special attention to major programs. Evaluations do not focus on programs with the greatest expenditures. It is estimated that programs with expenditures of less than \$250 million were evaluated twice as much compared to those spending more than that amount.

• (1240)

I must underline that according to 1991–92 figures, evaluations done on a seven-year period focused on 24 per cent of program spending. If we take into account the cost of debt service, evaluations were on only 18 per cent of expenditures over a seven-year period. Also, starting with 1991–92 figures, evaluations done over that period focused on only 24 per cent of program spending.

A second problem with governmental program evaluation has to do with the quality of controls regarding the evolution of those programs. By placing evaluation services within departments, we have given the immediate needs of managers precedence over those of the government and the public. How? They neglect the basic role of program evaluation which is to ascertain program effectiveness and question them if necessary, for the sole purpose of allowing for optimal allocation of resources.

In fact, the evaluations cover operational aspects only and in no way determine the programs' relevance or cost-effectiveness. The Canadian public service, as well as any Western bureaucracy, is rather self-sufficient and very resistant political interference in its methods of operation. There is no systematic evaluation of programs involving more than one department. The House of Commons could establish a system to that effect as a symbol of the involvement of the population in the political