

while we are told by the department that evaluations are going on, and by the President of the Treasury Board that within each department there are now resources to carry on evaluations, the minister is not sure whether such evaluations are going on or whether the resources are available to his department. In fact, there is no branch of the ministry of industry, trade and commerce set up for the specific purpose of conducting evaluations.

Such evaluations as may be made are conducted within the branches and divisions which themselves are responsible for administering the programs, and one might be excused for suspecting that such evaluations might not be utterly objective. The absence of that information and the unwillingness of the government to provide us with this kind of evaluation and study, is all the more reason the Program Forecast, including budgets A, B and X, should be made available to members of parliament.

These are not secret documents, but there is a tendency on the part of governments in Canada to regard all pieces of paper written on in the offices of the ministries as confidential or secret whether or not they are worth anything. So, those Program Forecasts are regarded as confidential and withheld from members of parliament. However, it is possible without a great deal of ingenuity to acquire copies of those Program Forecasts, at least for some departments. When one opens them to get some clear description of the programs which are identified in the estimates merely by figures, one appreciates how clearly are set out the objectives and descriptions of these programs. They are readily identified and the changes in government programs are visible. It is easy, as indeed it should be, for members to establish which programs are being adjusted or changed, and thus to ask on behalf of the people of Canada why they are being changed. It is also possible under budget X to identify which projects in the judgment of the departments involved are of least importance and which can most readily be dropped without serious damage to Canada. That kind of information seems to be incredibly important.

Let me refer briefly to such a Program Forecast dealing with one department. The description of a new wing being established to undertake policy planning and research is set out in a way which would permit members of parliament serving on a committee to get straight to the heart of the changes in policy and to ask sensible questions on behalf of the Canadian people instead of milling around day after day with the very limited resources placed at the disposal of parliament by the ministry to get at what in fact is actually going on.

In the ministry of industry, trade and commerce in the last few years the sum of \$1.3 billion has been expended on programs for the purpose of aiding Canadian industry to develop Canadian technology and exports. These are laudable objectives, but \$1.3 billion is a lot of money. We have only the department's word for it that the money is being effectively and efficiently used. Forgive me, Mr. Speaker, if I regard the department as a prejudiced witness in this case: it has a vested interest in maintaining and augmenting the funds at its disposal. It seems to me quite within the framework of the parliamentary democracy of the 1970's that members of parliament should be provided with the kind of information which can test the compe-

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tence of the department as it asserts that, in fact, its programs are being carried out effectively. That kind of information, I put it to members of the House through you, Mr. Speaker, is to a large extent available in these Program Forecasts.

I may say in passing that the absence of evaluations of programs of the kind I have mentioned, this \$1.3 billion alphabet soup program which our party has criticized at some length in recent months, leads me to wonder whether in fact even the Treasury Board is being given any reason for the continuation of these programs. On what basis, I wonder, does the Treasury Board decide to allocate \$151 million in this fiscal year for these programs if in fact the evaluations are not being done or not being made available? If they are available to the Treasury Board and to the minister I think they should be available to members of parliament.

We are dealing here with a fundamental principle which has two aspects. One is the sovereign right of parliament to get at the facts of the case before granting supply. The other is the newer idea that government, to the greatest extent possible, must be carried on with a minimum of information being made available to the public. There is a tendency to regard all documentation as privileged or confidential. I think that is a dangerous tendency because, regardless of whether it puts one government at a political disadvantage by providing its opposition with that information, looking at the totality of the government process what happens is that departments grow. We see evidence of tremendous increases in staff at upper levels right now. These departments grow, programs are undertaken and money is being spent at increasing rates each year, yet less and less information is available to those ordinary members of parliament who in the end accept the responsibility for deciding whether the programs make sense. I put it to you that the kind of request we have made makes sense and is in keeping with the concept of modern government, and the role of members of parliament in a modern government. If we are not to give members of parliament that kind of information, we might as well concede that we are being run by a rapidly growing bureaucracy, building upon itself and concealing from those to whom it is responsible all the information it can.

I think that is a regrettable and dangerous tendency, and I would urge this House to order that these documents be made available in order that we may in the future deal more intelligently with the multibillion dollar expenditure programs.

Mr. Jim Fleming (York West): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak on the motion presented to this House by the hon. member for Lakeshore (Mr. Grier), I find myself in a very difficult position. I think the principle the hon. member has put forward, the ideal that the public and certainly members of parliament should have access to as much information as possible, surely is supported by members on both sides of this House. However, it is a matter of getting down to the practicality of whether the government can supply all the information to which it has access in making judgment decisions and still be sure that when it makes decisions, subject to opposition reaction and comment, it can act in the best interests of the people of