

Government of Canada

What are the criteria set up by the Australians? They require the report to answer the following question. Note this: They have questions which the report has to address. First of all, what are we here for? That is an interesting question. If some Crown corporations addressed that question they might not be able to come up with an answer.

The second question is: What do they do? They are supposed to detail the sort of things they actually do.

The third question is: Who is it that does it? They have to tell us who is involved in the process. Have you ever seen that in one of those annual reports that you read? I can see you shaking your head. You have read them all from cover to cover, but I bet you do not know who actually carries out the functions. They do not tell you what the functions are anyway. Yet that is the sort of thing we would have if we followed the Australian system.

They also have to give us some sort of idea of how well they perform. Is that not interesting? They have to actually evaluate and assess themselves. That is putting a pretty heavy burden on a Department or Crown corporation, committee, board or agency. We would be asking them to actually tell us how well they think they are performing. That is incredible because it might be embarrassing. Instead of having a happy face on some of these reports, we would perhaps have a red face. That might be bad for them, but I suspect it would be good for the rest of us.

As well as those things, they actually require information like the names of people who do the jobs and their telephone numbers. Can you believe that? The public would actually know who it is they want to get hold of to deal with a particular problem. That is inconceivable, but that is what the Australians would have you put in a report. To me it makes sense.

Then there is the question of timeliness. Does the report actually get filed on time? The Auditor General tells us a lot of them in this country do not, but in Australia they rap your knuckles if you do not get it in on time. You do not get a gold star on your work book the way you would in Grade 1 or 2. In Australia it is important that this be done, and I think it should be important here.

Then we have financial information. I see the Hon. Member for Québec-Est (Mr. Tremblay) over there. I know he is most concerned about Part III of the Estimates each year. They contain some expenditure material, but only of a minimal nature. The same thing with respect to the Public Accounts. We could be getting relevant, detailed and important information in that annual report if we followed a system like the Australians are.

I know that the Government in its response, because I was told ahead of time, is going to say that in fact it has a wonderful system in place right now. It makes a lot of sense. We do things perfectly. There is nothing wrong with the system. My suggestion of the Australian method would unnecessarily

complicate things. It would just ruin the whole system we have, and it is such a wonderful system.

What I hope the Government will talk about is what the Auditor General had to say about that wonderful system. I hope it will mention, as I have, some of the Auditor General's concerns, the fact that he is not impressed with the quality of the reports, and the fact that there is nothing to specify what is to be in the report. There is no purpose to the report. There is no idea of who the Auditor General is. The reports are often late and perhaps completely irrelevant because of the time frame in which they have to report.

It will be interesting to see if the Government addresses those issues and, in doing so, can honestly say that it has a good system which does not need to be changed. This motion is put forward for the purpose of improving the system. Surely you and I, and all other Members in the Chamber here tonight, in fact all Members of the House of Commons, and all members of the Press Gallery who are watching on television, are here to ensure that we do things better. We are not here to do things worse. We are not here to just carry on making the same mistakes. We are here to do things better. That is the purpose of the motion.

That motion, which you so eloquently read and which I moved, says:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of establishing uniform guidelines and an evaluation procedure similar to those presently in use in Australia, upon which Government Departments, Boards, Crown Corporations and Agencies should base their annual reports and thereby establish a system by which those reports which have most effectively complied with these guidelines may be acknowledged.

In fact, maybe rewarded. I would like to move that the motion be referred to committee so that we can deal with it properly and the Government can address it properly so as to improve the system.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel R. Tremblay (Québec-Est): Mr. Speaker, in addressing the motion tabled by the Hon. Member for York East (Mr. Redway) to establish guidelines and evaluation procedures for annual reports, I would like to emphasize the major progress made in this country on the quality of the information the Government provides on departments and programs through the new version of the Estimates.

Hon. Members are of course aware they now have access to a vast store of new and more detailed information in the Estimates and that these documents, in their present form, are a remarkable improvement in terms of disclosure of the information that forms the basis for government accountability.

Briefly, the new Estimates are divided into three parts. Part I is concerned with the multi-year expenditure plan, which is first tabled in Parliament as part of the Budget brought down by the Minister of Finance, in the form of an overview of public spending which highlights past and future spending priorities and their impact on the economy. Part I also contains