

## Q & A WITH KATHY O'HARA

*I have a comment and then a question. First, the comment is that the evaluation of programs occurred rather dramatically in 1995 with the budget and I can give you one good example with Lloyd Axworthy and the department that he had—Human Resources Development. There was a look at; I think it was some 50 programs. When they were looked at honestly and critically, it was found that only five of these actually were effective in achieving their objectives. The rest were scrapped and those five were continued. So it's an interesting, but I think a helpful example of why it is so important to have review of programs, and that they don't just continue on and on.*

*The question that I have is based on some discussions that I've had with, not one, but quite a number of people in Manitoba, who are finding that one of the obstacles at the provincial level to making progress is departmental turf wars; that the differing objectives of two departments in budgetary, as well as in other respects, is hampering getting decisions done.*

*So I would ask you as somebody who is involved in machinery of government issues at the federal level, how are you addressing this problem?*

Well, turf wars certainly aren't unique to provincial governments. One of the things we have found we need to do increasingly is create horizontal processes, because you're right, there will be this constant fighting until you bring the players together.

Mr. Nault is very familiar with a horizontal process that was established with respect to aboriginal programming, involving a group of ministers and supporting interdepartmental groups of officials. It was clear that even though the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is responsible for, if I recall correctly, some 85% of all federal aboriginal spending, there still were at least 14 or 15 other departments and agencies involved in aboriginal programming, all with their little piece of the puzzle. So that's one example of a way you can bring people together, and frankly, do a little bit of crunching of heads. One of the objectives of such exercises is exactly that—just trying to beat down the turf.

*There have been a number of new initiatives in the federal civil service regarding dispute resolution. I know there are some policies and*

*conferences happening. Do you have anything new that might be coming up in the area?*

Not that I'm aware of but these initiatives tend to originate in individual departments.

*Is the innovation in things like special operating agencies, changes to Crown corporations, governance models anything there are happening lately?*

You may recall that when the Auditor General's report was tabled last February, as part of the government's response Minister Alcock launched a number of reviews, including one on Crown Corporations. So he may speak to that tonight.

*I just wanted to make an observation on one of the main themes of your remarks, Kathy. It has to do with the idea that performance measurement and performance reporting can provide the basis for both organisational and policy learning. Work I've been doing on jurisdictions around the world which are deemed to be the leading jurisdictions in terms of efforts at performance measurement and performance management are all leading me to depressing conclusions that the real problem is a lack of implementation. We now have 87 entities, which file reports with Parliament on their performance over the last year in companionship with performance plans, but I'm not sure that the utilisation is there.*

*So I wonder if there is an underlying problem here that we have too much for information now, but not enough knowledge, and that the gathering and the reporting of this information is seen as a threatening activity. So there isn't honesty and comprehensiveness and balance in the reporting that goes on, that in fact it may complicate learning or prevent learning from happening when it all gets focused on specific measures and progress against those measures—that it makes for a myopic view of the world and we miss things that are happening that are not within the range of those measures. In cross-departmental learning and reporting we just have to coordinate for more.*

*Finally, I just looked at some stuff on their supply process and estimates, which are the main opportunities, supposedly, for MPs and senators to raise questions about performance, and the utilisation is nonexistent. I think I found two references over two years, where there's been a reference to these performance reports. So somehow we have to make this more than a ritualistic activity, and I wonder what*

*we can do to create incentives internal to the public service to take this activity seriously?*

I agree with you totally. The Estimates documents, including the Report on Planning and Priorities and the Departmental Performance Reports that are tabled respectively in the House in the spring and in the fall, are just not providing Parliament with the kind of information Parliamentarians need. They also do not reflect the learning process that I talked about earlier. And as you pointed out, they are often very simplistic and report on only a few measures. You can't really get a good sense of what's going on in the department. You used the word ritualistic, and I think that's a good way to describe the process. Now one of the answers may be minority government, because I think what we're going to find is that there may be a different dynamic in Standing Committees when they review these documents, and there will be more challenge. The risk in a minority government, however, is that the process becomes partisan as opposed to a real opportunity for the Minister, senior officials, and the members of the Standing Committee to actually discuss what is going on in the department—what's working, what isn't working, how it could be improved. We've been talking for many years about trying to improve those documents, and I think it has to be a priority.

*One observation and one question. For a couple of years, as assistant to Prime Minister Trudeau, one of my jobs was to read all Cabinet documents, and it struck me then (and I would venture to say it is the case now) that those documents were quite comprehensive. The arguments were well put, the information in them was timely, and it was all secret—and I would bet it remains the same today. I always thought that 95 per cent of those documents could be published on the front page of the newspaper the next day and greatly improve the public debate without hurting the public interest. That is just an observation; another is nothing you can do about that.*

*My question is about subsidiarity, and another kind of turf war: federal-provincial. Does the current Administration have any position on the doctrine of subsidiarity, and has there been any comprehensive examination of programs to see what the provinces might be do better, and in some cases, what Ottawa might do better?*

In answer to your first question, the answer is no, there is not a particular focus on subsidiarity. I think what you've seen, for example, with the health accord is more the notion of asymmetrical federalism as an approach to federal-provincial issues, as opposed to subsidiarity.

*Kathy, I just wanted to get you to comment a little farther by linking two things that you talked about. One was, somebody raised the question of turf wars, and that raised the response from you about more horizontal initiatives and approaches. We've heard about that from governments across the country for the last 10 years, and there's been a lot of initiatives, a lot of experiments, a lot of talking—some successful, and some not so successful.*

*I guess I want to link it back to the accountability discussion. It seems like one of the things that I hear after talking to literally thousands of public servants and politicians on this is this idea of accountability and shared accountability. Some people think that the concept of shared accountability is not worrisome at all. Some people think it's enormously worrisome. Many ministers think it's enormously worrisome. They think if you go out there and you cut across these departments or levels of government, what's going to happen to me in Question Period? So I guess I want to ask you to comment a little further on, as you guys think about more horizontal initiatives, more collaboration, whatever it may be, and you think about accountability, what is your thinking on accountability with respect to shared accountability?*

This is one area where there's a lot of continuity in our thinking about accountability. Not everybody agrees with our view, but we hold pretty firmly to the notion of ministerial responsibility and accountability—the notion that for every department and agency within the federal government, there is a minister accountable whom you can identify.

I would share people's questions and concerns about how Ministers could share accountability. I don't know how that would work in Parliament since responsible government is based on individual Ministerial accountability.

In the experience we had with the group of Ministers that worked on aboriginal issues that I discussed earlier, there was no question which Minister was responsible for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Just because we brought 14 or 15 Ministers together in a horizontal exercise to try to work together on an issue, that in no way changed the Ministerial responsibility and accountability.

We always find when we try to bring officials together in horizontal exercises, if we don't make one department accountable for that exercise, it will go nowhere because if no department, no deputy, no ADM is accountable for the exercise, then nobody is. So one of the lessons we have learned is that for a horizontal exercise to be successful, you have to identify accountability.

*On this question of horizontal activities, when I was at the federal level, I led a rather interesting cross-departmental science and technology effort. The interesting thing, in a sense, was that I was at that point in Industry Canada, working with John Manley, not a senior minister. But we had processes at the ministerial level, we had processes going on at the civil servant level, and we had a public process in which we brought together people from federal, provincial levels of government, industry, scientists and various people from the community who were interested in building a science and technology effort in their own community.*

*What it created was a rather fervent dynamic in which it was a time of ideas and intense discussion; it was a time of program review when there were a lot of budget changes, which added to the whole issue. But in fact, what it provided was an opportunity in many instances for individual ministers and departments to take their own look at what was going on, and to make decisions in their own department.*

*In other words, I had no responsibility for what was decided in Defence or Environment or in a whole lot of other departments. But what it did was to create the environment where all of these ideas were fervently discussed and in a number of instances it was quite a dramatic move forward. In some instances, the department did not take advantage of the opportunity that was there. But out of that came quite a different view of science and research and development, and in the end, a lot of new investment came from it.*

*So you don't necessarily have to have one department taking responsibility for everything that comes out of a process. You do have to have in Question Period one Minister is going to answer a specific question on a specific topic, and you do have to have accountability of ministers for different areas within a cross-from the your departmental process.*

I would agree. You were accountable for delivering on that process, but then within it there would have been different Ministers with their own accountabilities who would stand up in Question Period and answer questions. Similarly, with Aboriginal Affairs, if it were a question about aboriginal health, Minister Nault wouldn't answer the question; it would be the Minister of Health.