

MPP's report from Queen's Park

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No doubt you will have heard of the C.D. Howe Research Institute, a private, non-political, non-profit organization founded in January, 1973, to undertake research into Canadian economic policy issues, with emphasis on fiscal, monetary, and international trade policy.

You may find interesting some excerpts from one of the Institute's publications: "Accountability and Control: The Government Expenditure Process".

"The expenditure process of any government is both the backbone around which much of government operates and its nervous system - sending out messages about what is important to government and what actions are to be taken... Parliamentary government is, in essence, a 'personal' system of government - responsibility is vested in, and exercised by, an individual. This is necessary if there is to be an accounting for the use of power. However, accountability is not always clearly defined, because a minister's individual and collective roles have resulted in a system of deliberately overlapping responsibilities."

"Public dissatisfaction with how and where governments spend money probably began with the first tax ever levied. The timelessness of this problem has not, however, dimmed public debate or concern. This is especially true of the past decade or so, when Canada, along with most other countries in the world, experienced rapid growth in government operations."

"This growth in government spending has been attributed to a number of factors. One of these was a number of decisions made in the 1960s that sought to enlarge the scope and significance of government involvement in redistributive social policies. These decisions resulted in increases in the level of spending of such programs as family allowances and old age pensions and the initiation of new programs, such as the Canada Pension Plan and guaranteed-income supplement and universal medical and hospitalization schemes."

FUND PROGRAMS

"During the 1960s and the early 1970s, attention was focussed upon the programs that governments elected to fund but in recent years this focus has shifted towards the level and growth of government expenditures as a whole and towards the economic implications of this growth. For example, recent debate has emphasized the impact of government spending in meeting the objectives that people believe characterize a certain policy, and the possibilities for more efficient means of meeting these objectives. Perhaps the most consistent concern has been the feeling that government spending is simply 'out of control'."

"In democratic government, ultimate authority and responsibility for the acceptance or rejection of a spending proposal rest with the elected members of the legislature. How real is this power in modern government?"

The Institute's report makes some suggestions for improvements which would clarify what governments view as priorities and how to deal with those priorities. "These improvements are based on the following principles:

- MORE AWARE** - A key to improved accountability is a better-informed and more aware public which has the opportunity to participate in the formation of fairly broad national (and provincial) priorities.
- Government itself, in a democratic society, must take responsibility for the priorities it decides to pursue and how it will pursue them.
- While any selection of priorities by the Cabinet must, of necessity, be subject to change, the set of priorities that obtain at any one time should be coherent. However, the application of these priorities may present numerous unresolved conflicts calling for continuous, but what may be at times only partly successful, efforts at co-ordination.
- If a system of control is to be effective, activities must be planned as thoroughly as possible.
- Ultimate control of, and accountability for, the expenditures of government must be exercised by the legislature."

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