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TELIDON SYSTEM—PROGRAMMING—HEARING-IMPAIRED
CANADIANS

Question No. 1,013—**Mr. Beatty:**

1. Is the government committed to the development of the Telidon system closed captioning of programming for hearing-impaired Canadians instead of encouraging the use of the system designed by the American PBS?
2. Is the government discouraging the use of the PBS system on programming designed for Canadians who are hearing-handicapped?
3. What is the time-frame for having the Telidon system commercially available?
4. What is the anticipated cost to deaf Canadians for the Telidon system and how does this figure compare to the cost of equipment compatible with the PBS system?
5. Will the Telidon system enable Canadian viewers to decode programming employing the PBS system?
6. What specific action is the government taking to increase the amount of programming available for the deaf?
7. What are the government's projections of the number of hours per week of programming for the deaf available over each of the next five years over Canadian broadcasting networks?
8. Does the government intend to make the Telidon system available for deaf Canadians through broadcasting, cable or a combination of the two and what is the timetable for making facilities available if they will not be introduced simultaneously?
9. What discussions, if any, have been held with Canadian broadcasters on the question of captioning or interpreting programming for the deaf and what steps have been taken by the broadcasters to increase such programming?

Mr. Peter Stollery (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): In so far as the Department of Communications is concerned, the answer to the above question is as follows: 1. In the long term the government is committed to the development of a Telidon-based closed captioning delivery system of providing television programming for the hearing-impaired for at least four reasons:

- (a) It is felt that the potential value of Telidon to the hearing-impaired is far superior to that of the PBS system, although the latter is already operational while the former is yet to be;
- (b) A full-service Telidon system would provide the deaf with a whole range of interactive services in addition to closed captioning, without their having to purchase a separate device which would serve only to provide captioned television;
- (c) For the sake of fully exploiting a vast international market for Telidon, it would be preferable to have one system which would provide captioning "plus" rather than two separate and therefore competing ones, which would result only in unnecessary market fragmentation to both;
- (d) Telidon technology makes more efficient use than the PBS system of the electromagnetic spectrum, which is a scarce resource, thereby freeing more spectrum to be used for other, non-related purposes.

It is, however, equally important to state, and to emphasize, that the department is actively pursuing with the Canadian Co-ordinating Council on Deafness, the National Film Board,

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the CBC and others, the development of an interim Telidon-based system for captioning. Indeed, draft specifications for such a decoder now exist and were presented at the Canadian Videotex Consultative Committee (CVCC) this spring. A special subcommittee of the CVCC which was given the mandate to examine the issue of television and the deaf recommended on September 27, 1980, that the Department of Communications establish price and availability for a Telidon decoder of minimal capability with an optional capability for decoding captions from the National Captioning Institute in the U.S.A. The Department of Communications is currently going out to industry to obtain this information.

2. No, the government is not actively discouraging the use of the PBS system. In fact, I am in agreement with the subcommittee on captioning's recommendation to the CVCC that no action be taken that may inhibit the orderly introduction and use of the system such as implementing regulatory, tariff, trade or broadcast barriers, at least until an equivalent Canadian system becomes available. However, the Telidon system is projected to be available in a similar time-frame, and the government wishes the hearing-impaired community in Canada to be fully aware of this goal to enable them to decide for themselves which device they will purchase. From recent information obtained from the manufacturer of the PBS decoder, the marketing of the decoder may be delayed because of the unavailability of "chips" from the manufacturer of the integrated circuits which has a two-year exclusive right to produce them. Also, the Canadian version of the PBS decoder requires an additional "chip" to display the French symbols. This chip has not yet been designed and, therefore, a Canadian version of the PBS decoder may be further delayed. This means that for the deaf to await the arrival of a Telidon terminal next year, should not result in any disadvantage. Moreover, captioned versions of U.S. programs are now being provided in some localities by cable companies allowing subscribers to use only a normal cable converter in the home. There is, therefore, already a low-cost alternative to the PBS decoder in these regions.

3. A "mini" Telidon terminal (comparable to and optionally compatible with the American decoders now available in the U.S.—but not capable of providing the full range of potential Telidon services) should be available on the Canadian market by next year.

4. It is expected that the Telidon terminal will be comparable in cost to the American devices—that is, approximately \$350. Ability to decode off-air captioned programming from the U.S. would represent an additional production cost. Exact costs will be volume-sensitive, and the market demand has not been quantified at this time.

5. Yes, but at an optional cost where direct reception over the air is involved.

6. The government has no direct control over the programming provided by broadcasters. However, the government has long been urging and will continue to urge the broadcasters, in general, and the CBC, in particular, to provide for the needs of the hearing-impaired. Ultimately, the amount of programming