

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I think I would ask the Hon. Member to read my letter very carefully. In fact, if she does not have a copy of it, I would be glad to send her one.

That letter pointed out to the President of Bell Canada Enterprises that in fact the CRTC has an obligation to ensure that subscribers of Bell Canada do not subsidize the unregulated operations of Bell Canada Enterprises.

I want to make sure that subscribers do not have to pay extraordinary costs. In order to determine whether or not there is a subsidy of any kind, the CRTC has to have information. It has to have information about the direct and the indirect costs which are associated with it. Therefore, I urged Bell Canada Enterprises to submit those costs, validated, to the CRTC, substantive information it does not now have, so it can look at the ruling that has been made to see whether or not it is appropriate.

MINISTER'S LETTER TO COMMISSION

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the letter says far more than this. I have the letter here. It suggests that the Minister would go to Cabinet over the decision if the CRTC did not do what she wanted it to do.

I ask her again if she will respond to the public interest and industry groups which want to see, as does our Party, the CRTC acting as an independent agency, able to judge the facts without a letter from the Minister saying she is going to go to Cabinet and see the decision is reversed if it does not come up with a decision she wants. That is inappropriate. Will she withdraw that letter?

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, there is no question of my withdrawing that letter. I would also like to point out to the Hon. Member that if any kind of decision is made by any agency where costs are imputed that do not relate to the direct and indirect costs which are a reality, then obviously the Government will question any such decision.

Costs have to be related to the direct and indirect costs that are the actuality in any situation.

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CANADIAN JOBS STRATEGY

LACK OF SKILLED LABOUR—APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM INQUIRY

Mr. Jim Jepson (London East): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. I am sure all Members of this House are enthused over the new unemployment figures which show a five-year low at 8.8 per cent.

Oral Questions

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jepson: I do commend the Minister for this. However, there are still many shortfalls within the small business industry for skilled labour. What consideration is the Minister giving to an apprenticeship program that is so sadly lacking in this country?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Of course we are delighted about the unemployment rate. I think that is what we call an achievement when we consider that 8.8 per cent is the lowest rate of unemployment in this country since 1982. I think it is something of which Canadians are proud.

At the same time I think the Hon. Member is right in terms of particular regions of the country, London, for example, where we face problems in skills shortages and skills development. For that reason we have invested I think it is \$297 million in the Canadian Jobs Strategy in 1987-88. That means that with this program we will be able to deal with those cases, particularly in southern Ontario.

It is obvious we will continue to work with the Canadian Jobs Strategy Program because I think it is the Government's best achievement in employment for three years.

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CANADIAN RADIO-TELEVISION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

BELL CANADA RATE INCREASE APPLICATION

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I also have here a copy of the letter which was signed by the Minister of Communications and sent to Mr. de Grandpré of Bell Canada. It clearly says that the Government would be prepared to overrule a decision that was not favourable. Given that the CRTC is a quasi-judicial body which should not be interfered with in that manner—granted appeals can be made to Cabinet later—does the Minister not feel that the action she took was improper? And will she not do the right thing and order that her letter be rescinded now?

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the Hon. Member has quite understood what is being done here. What we are doing is separating monopoly services, and the cost of monopoly services, from unregulated services. That in fact is what Bill C-13 did when we passed it in this House earlier this year. It separated the costs of one kind of operation from the costs of another kind of operation. That is the same policy I stipulated in this letter.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the Minister refuses to rescind her letter, I will now ask her boss, the Prime Minister, to get involved in this issue.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!