

Supply

critical of what the Conservative Party did during its eight months in office. It set up one private company to handle all advertising business. It really amounted to a conflict of interest when it set up its friends in ultimate centralized patronage.

An hon. Member: Shame!

Mr. Regan: That was shameful. I am glad we in this government have followed a very different course.

Mr. Beatty: You hired the Canadian Media Corporation which did not exist before.

Mr. Regan: The hon. member is not well informed. To the best of my knowledge the Canadian Media Corporation was only hired by the Conservatives after they came into office in my province.

Mr. Beatty: It is a Liberal agency which was created after you took office.

Mr. Regan: Not at all. Perhaps the hon. member could talk about that at another time.

The hon. member made a comparison between the amount being spent in Canada on advertising and the amount spent in the United States. He should keep in mind the basic difference between the Canadian government and the American government. This is a government which has very, very important social programs which do not exist in the United States. Thank heavens we have them. I know that he and some of his colleagues would like to see those programs done away with, but that people on this side of the House believe those programs are important and they carry with them the responsibility that they be communicated. It is a very different situation as between the Government of Canada and the government of the United States.

When it comes to the contents of individual ads, of how one gets one's message across in the best way, we must keep in mind that it should not be decided by amateurs but by experts. I hope the hon. member will take the lesson of talking with people who are in the business and recognizing that in a co-ordinated program we do not judge the billboard alone but determine the impact of the entire co-ordinated message.

We can well be proud of our approach to advertising. I assure the House that we have no intention of having advertising used for narrow partisan purposes or of allowing public dollars to be used for that purpose.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Regan: We are determined to see to it that the public has the facts before it through factual advertising. I notice the hon. member did not mention the Constitution. He did not go on record as saying whether it was wrong or right to advertise the Constitution. As a result of ads being placed with mail-in coupons for further information on the Constitution, there was a demand in the short days for which the Constitution ad ran of something in the vicinity of 120,000 replies. Any advertising man will tell us that that was a phenomenal response. It indicated a vast level of interest on the part of the Canadian

public and that the advertising was well justified because the public responded and wanted additional information.

Those of us who are so close to matters in the House of Commons, because we come here every day, tend sometimes to think that everyone in Canada is leaning on their television sets, turning to the channels carrying the debates of the House of Commons, and living and dying on the basis of every witty exchange across the floor. That is not how the real world is at all. Out there the people are preoccupied with a great number of problems of their own. A great number of the people know little about government programs. I believe we are fulfilling our responsibility by advertising those programs so that all Canadians benefit from them.

Mr. Blenkarn: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Would the minister confirm to the House that all polls taken in the province of Quebec will be released when they are made, as soon and as promptly as possible?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin by thanking the hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty) for providing us with the opportunity to debate this issue. I disagree with the hon. Secretary of State (Mr. Regan) about the importance of this issue; I think it is about time we had the opportunity to debate the role of polls and the role of advocacy advertising in Canadian politics.

The Secretary of State went to a great deal of trouble to avoid the issue. I do not think, if I understood the mover of the motion correctly, that anyone was taking issue with the government's making information available to Canadians about social programs or the promotion of tourism. We are talking about the increasing role which advocacy advertising and the taking of public opinion polls are playing in Canadian politics. We are really talking, as in so many other areas of life in the late twentieth century, about our morals and self-understanding—in this case the morality and self-understanding of politics—catching up with available technology at this particular time in history.

• (1610)

One of the things we have available to us now which we did not have when many of our political standards were first established is the availability of mass-media advertising, and the explosion of scientific ways of measuring public opinion. I think it is about time that we did have this kind of debate, because how we handle this at the early stages of what I consider to be a dangerous trend will determine the future course of Canadian politics.

Government polling is becoming more and more significant as a vehicle of determining government policy and advocacy advertising is becoming more and more significant as a way of selling government policy. After his re-election in 1974, the