

Broadcasting

There is a continuing government involvement in satellites for broadcast purposes. There are studies presently under way to determine the suitability of the Anik C satellite to provide an interim direct broadcast satellite service prior to the launch of a dedicated direct broadcast satellite system which will probably take place in the late 1980s if a decision to proceed with such a system is taken.

There are Department of Communications studies on various DBS scenarios covering social, economic, regulatory, institutional and policy aspects. Later on this afternoon I believe one of our members will address the other problem this raises which, of course, is that of pay television, also addressed in the Therrien report. I am not sure whether the hon. member opposite is in favour or opposed, but these things are so intimately connected that we cannot discuss remote broadcasting without also talking about direct broadcasting; and direct broadcasting is, in effect, different from pay television, an issue which is very controversial and complex.

Mr. Waddell: Did you say too complex to debate in this House?

Mr. Stollery: There is that hon. gentleman again. He does not have any discipline. His colleague had his 20 minutes, and I did not say a word, but the hon. member can always be relied upon, if anything even slightly provokes him, to get into the act. He just cannot sit in his chair and keep his trap shut. It would be nice if he would do so for just another three minutes.

Mr. Waddell: You should talk!

Mr. Stollery: The Department of Communications is continuing with preparations for the 1983 regional administrative radio conference at which orbital positions and operating frequencies for the broadcast satellites will be assigned. Much of this subject matter is certainly not in layman's language. We are dealing now with who gets what on the broadcast band, and that is not a subject which can be resolved within Canada. It involves international co-operation not only between the United States and Canada but also with all of the countries in the western hemisphere because anyone can put up a satellite and beam down at any of the countries in the western hemisphere if he is using a geostationary satellite.

The primary task of the 1983 regional administrative radio conference is to create an environment within which a large number of sovereign states can create domestic satellite broadcasting systems tailored to their own requirements and conditions.

The need for satellites for broadcast purposes has been recognized for some time. As early as 1974 a joint Department of Communications-CBC study was undertaken to ascertain the potential of DBS for CBC's extension of coverage needs, and much of the work covered in that report is still pertinent today. I also point out to the hon. member that I believe that in the past week the CBC has declared its intention to apply for a licence for CBC 2 which, I am sure, will be of interest to his constituency.

Appropriate regulation and policies governing a Canadian direct broadcasting system will depend on the ultimate goals of establishing for the service the technical and economic characteristics and the environment in which it will function. All these aspects are presently under review within the Department of Communications.

In closing I would just like to touch briefly on the availability of satellite channel capacity because concern has been expressed of late that the availability of satellite transponders for television distribution will shortly be insufficient to meet the demand until the Anik D is launched.

I see that my time is nearly up. I would not want to leave the hon. member waiting with bated breath for the other part of my argument which I cannot make. I would like to thank him again for bringing this subject to our attention because, as he knows—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

Mr. Dave Nickerson (Western Arctic): Mr. Speaker, I will be fairly brief so as to allow more time for my colleagues on my left to complete the discussion on this subject. It is not very often that I agree with the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Fulton), but this is one of those few occasions.

I am pleased to support, at least in principle, the idea he puts before us today. It is a subject matter on which there is really not much difference between the various parties represented here.

● (1640)

The main difference, if there is one, is that members on this side of the House would like to see this matter debated by the elected representatives of the people of Canada either in this chamber or in committees of this House, whereas hon. members on the government side would prefer to have the matter dealt with by the Department of Communications, by the technical experts alone. My preference would be to have this matter dealt with, initially at any rate, not in this House, as suggested in the motion, but rather in a parliamentary committee because it is, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Communications (Mr. Stollery) has outlined, a rather complicated technical matter. In fact, the technical nature of this matter and the advances in communications technology made in the last few years are the reason for the difficulties which we are facing today. What we see is technology outstripping legislation. In many respects it is good that the laws of Canada are not changing quickly and that it takes time, time needed for public discussion, for the laws of this country to undergo change. But in this case a way should be found of dealing with technological advances much faster than when, for instance, we make changes to the Criminal Code.

The motion refers to the special situation which exists in the northern remote areas. I submit that many of the objections raised by the parliamentary secretary apply much more to the south than to the north. In the remote northern areas of our country we do not have the choice of channels and radio