

Routine Proceedings

I do not want to be too cynical but we are somewhat cynical about this matter. This is our only concern with this entire report. Otherwise we are indeed in favour of enhanced coverage of the Parliament of Canada.

Mr. Blaine A. Thacker (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I did not sit on this committee. My friend opposite seems to have much more detailed information on the matter than I do.

I am wondering if he can elaborate on the cost. He seems to want to have the service provided without people paying more than eight, ten, or fifteen cents at the maximum. Surely the question is whether the users pay for it or whether it is the taxpayer in general who pays for it. I think he is saying that he would rather have the taxpayer at large subsidizing this operation rather than the users.

I would like him to expand on that point. My own starting point would be that the people who decide they want to take the channel should be paying for it, rather than imposing it on seniors and poor people who are not watching it. They would subsidize the few who are watching it.

Mr. Butland: Madam Speaker, that is a good question. It is one that we wrestled with. Canadians who wrote in said that they were willing to pay eight or ten cents a month.

The cable companies are enjoying a good rate of return. What they have done time and time again lately is they have inflicted these MuchMusic channels, the sports network channels, with no choice to the people. They have also inflicted NewsWorld, I might add, at 50 cents a month. They have done it with great regularity. As I have already pointed out, the profits are great.

Probably unrealistically we would anticipate that the cable companies should do it free of charge. We believe that CBC could restructure its priorities because this particular media coverage of the House of Commons has been long neglected for the whole 12 years it has been in place. It just has not been addressed.

There were recommendations made previously that would have been rather costless, but no one moved to react to them. It has been on the back-burner for a long time.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Madam Speaker, if I recall correctly the comments of my hon. colleague, he indicated that a majority of members appear to be concerned about the opportunities the opposition would have to condemn government initiatives.

I would ask him the following. If these initiatives on the part of the government are extremely sound, is that therefore not a minimal risk? In fact, is not democracy as we know it, as it has evolved, gravitating toward greater openness?

• (1240)

Mr. Butland: Madam Speaker, yes, I certainly concur. It is a minimal risk for the government to take. It anticipates that we are going to criticize and probably condemn most of its policies. This is not the time or the place to say that most of them are condemnable, but I throw it in anyway. I do not think it is a great risk for the government to take. The enhanced coverage will give it opportunities.

The hon. member's last comment was the key. It is toward more openness that I think the Canadian public is after. Certainly many say now that that is the problem with Meech Lake: it has not been nearly open enough.

I am certainly a long-time educator and a short-time politician. Education of members of the Canadian public is extremely important. I think they will appreciate the openness and what really goes on here, rather than providing them with somewhat of an artificial situation much of the time.

Mr. Ian Waddell (Port Moody—Coquitlam): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague, the member for Sault Ste. Marie, first, on his participation in this committee which is yeoman's work and, second, on his analysis which I think is excellent.

The hon. member for Lethbridge asked my colleague whether or not the users should pay. No, the taxpayers should pay, in general, because it should be open to everyone. It is like medicare. You can use it if you need to use it. You can tune in if you want to. This is the Parliament of Canada. This is not MuchMusic or soap opera. It should be open.

The cable companies can afford to put it on. They are making a 28 per cent rate of return, twice the amount of the phone companies. The CBC gets a budget from Parliament. It should be for nothing that it is on. We in