

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 10, 1970

[Translation]

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INFORMATION

STATEMENT ON POLICY—ESTABLISHMENT OF INFORMATION CANADA

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, on November 4 I tabled the report of the task force on information which had been asked to examine federal information services and to recommend ways in which the federal government might improve its communications with the Canadian people. I now propose to outline briefly the government's plans.

The task force made 17 major recommendations. We accept those recommendations in principle, with two exceptions. Recommendation number five proposed the establishment of a citizens advisory bureau and neighbourhood councils. The government is sympathetic toward this proposal but feels it warrants further study. Recommendation number ten suggested that a government agency undertake a role as public advocate which we feel more properly belongs to Parliament.

The task force found that the information responsibilities of the federal government have not been discharged effectively despite considerable expenditure. It was our suspicion of this which moved us to ask for this task force study in the first place. As a step toward rectifying this situation we have accepted a recommendation to set up a small new unit called Information Canada which will be established at the beginning of April as part of the Department of Supply and Services. The unit will report direct to a minister. I am asking the Minister without Portfolio, the hon. member for York-Scarborough, who is already responsible for citizenship, to take responsibility for its initial planning and development in order that it might be as ready as possible for operational status at the beginning of the new fiscal year.

This organization is proposed mainly for three reasons. First, Information Canada will promote co-operation among federal information offices now operating in mutual isolation. The object will be to increase effectiveness as well as to save money by reducing duplication in the use of staff and equipment and by better joint use of the government's information resources.

A similar approach was recommended by the Glassco Royal Commission on Government Organization. We expect that co-ordination will result in more coherent information, clearer and more understandable to Canadians than it has been in the past.

The second reason for establishing information Canada is that there are many information offices in the federal government, but each now speaks for its own particular departmental concern. There is no machinery to deal with information on broad governmental concerns affecting more than one department.

The third reason is to be able to learn better the views of the Canadian people. The unit is therefore designed not merely as a vehicle for dissemination of information but to provide better systems for Canadians to make known their viewpoints to their government.

I pause at this juncture, Mr. Speaker, to emphasize that the government recognizes the fact that the primary responsibility for conveying to the government the views and attitudes of Canadians has always remained and always should remain with Members of Parliament. The capabilities of the elected representatives in these respects should be strengthened and employed; in no sense is it the government's intention to diminish the proper role of the private member in representing the views of his constituents.

To achieve these three objectives we plan an organization whose new staff, exclusive of three component units being transferred from other government agencies, will total less than 150. Of this total, which will include administrative and clerical workers, most will come from the existing public service.