

The Disabled

should be made and additions that should be considered by Bell Canada, was that they increase the cost to the consumer and place a bigger financial burden upon Bell Canada. I can sympathize with that point of view, but we are dealing with something which I think transcends the matter of cost to consumers. We are dealing with a person's hearing ability. That is something which is critical to all of us. A few more dollars being spent by the consumer to aid the hearing impaired is unarguable. If that is what a Commons committee looking further into this matter recommends, then Bell Canada and the people with normal hearing should be more than willing to give consideration to a slight additional cost if it were really to assist the hearing impaired.

In connection with Motion No. 91, of course we endorse the principle of enhancing opportunities for the hearing impaired. It is in line with the commitment the House has made to the "Obstacles" report and with the Charter of Rights. The question is how we best enhance opportunities for the hearing impaired.

There are several areas at which the committee could look. First, it could look at ensuring if the equipment of provincial telephone companies is compatible, such as B.C. Tel and Sask Tel. As members of the committee we should figure out a way to ensure that non-Bell telephone systems can be altered so that they are hearing aid compatible. Bell Canada has made a commitment to continue to ensure that its receivers are compatible. Given its commitment, we should try to work out a similar arrangement with provincial telephone companies.

Second, it could look at labelling. When I was consumer affairs critic for this Party for about three years, I learned that we would never be able to see the name of a product if all labels recommended by various commissions and committees were stuck all over it in both official languages, in imperial and metric. We should look at putting labels on telephones that are compatible with hearing aids for people who can see perfectly well. They would take precedence over many other labels of which I can think. We should be putting labels on all telephones that are compatible with hearing aids so that when hearing impaired persons buy telephones they will know that they can use them. That sounds reasonable. We should look at labelling public telephones. When we think of the number of public telephones in the country, that in itself will be a major but very necessary undertaking.

The Committee could also look at the idea of international standards so that some day we will be sure that technology will meet the need of the hearing impaired. Canada could take the role at the international level given the expertise of Bell Canada in this area. We have done it before and Bell's expertise in the area could be most useful internationally.

Then the committee could look at the extent to which the mobility of the hearing impaired is deterred in the workplace and how best to prevent it. There are many hundreds of thousands of productive individuals whose ability is impaired as a result of their hearing deficiency. This is something we as Members of Parliament should be looking at to correct.

● (1650)

The right of access to telecommunications by hearing impaired individuals is a very important issue. It is a non-partisan issue. As technology increases, it is only right that the largest disabled group in Canada be guaranteed equal accessibility. It is in that spirit that I endorse the motion by the Hon. Member for Beaches.

As that Hon. Member said earlier, the subject matter of this Bill, as technical, detailed and important as it is to the hearing impaired of this country, should be sent to the appropriate standing committee for detailed study and the calling of witnesses. Members on all sides of the House could be made aware not only of what Bell Canada and the provincial non-Bell companies can do now, but might be able to do in the future as technology increases. I would like to hear suggestions from the Canadian Hearing Society and other associations which have ideas to present to the committee based on the recommendations of this motion.

I am sure this Government would want to listen to the report of the disabled and to pay very close attention to the thrust of that report. I hope that Government Members recognize the obligation we have to Canada's hearing impaired and allow the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture to give this motion in the name of the Hon. Member for Beaches further examination. Therefore I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor):

That the motion be withdrawn and that the subject matter thereof be referred to the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt this motion?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Jack Burghardt (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to speak to Motion No. 91 with regard to aid for the hearing impaired. I want to say first that we agree with the honourable intentions of the Hon. Member for Beaches (Mr. Young) in presenting this motion. We know of his work on the Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped which came out with a far-reaching report concerning all handicapped and disabled persons. The report was entitled "Obstacles". Therefore, we know of his honourable intentions.

The motion presented to the House fails to take into consideration much of the work and many of the areas of progress undertaken by the Department of Communications in dealing with this very important subject matter. In the next few minutes I would like to share with the House some of these areas which the Department of Communications has already undertaken. Many of the steps taken thus far came about as a result of recommendations in the "Obstacles" report to which I referred earlier. Before speaking to those recommendations, I remind the House that the Department of Communications has for a number of years been vitally concerned in promoting telecommunication services for the disabled.