

Supply

a dangerous trend in our government, one that must stop, and a good place to begin to draw the line is on this motion today.

Hon. Gerald Regan (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, it is my belief that the essence of responsible government is that government informs the public of its initiatives, policies and laws. We cannot have a responsible government if we do not have an informed electorate. I do not believe it is possible for any government to discharge its responsibility of informing the public without utilizing advertising as a very important tool in the process. So I guess you could mark me down as one who rather strongly believes not only that it is responsible for governments to advertise, but that governments have the responsibility to advertise.

In a country as vast as Canada, with our scattered population and the proliferation of television channels, many of them carrying American programs, it is not a very easy task for any government to reach all of the public and get a message across on important policies or laws. It is a very difficult task which requires a variety of approaches to reach a far-flung public. A suggestion has been made to report on laws, policies and programs available to taxpayers. I know that immediately a lot of people will say that that is the job of the media. However, on reflection I think almost any fair-minded person will come quickly to the conclusion that it is not the responsibility of the media, and it is not something they are well equipped to do. The media is equipped to select the most newsworthy items which occur in government, and depending on the type of media, whether it be print, radio, television or whatever, they are often able to highlight the major features of a particular program in only a relatively superficial way. They do not have a responsibility to report on every government program or its details. It is not their job to tell a person exactly how to qualify for a home insulation grant. That is not what they are about at all. Therefore, we must immediately conclude that the media cannot perform the task, nor should they be expected to, of informing all Canadians in relation to government programs. That is not the way you are going to do it.

The question then is, are there ways in which the public can be reached other than by advertising? Well, there may be a variety depending on how broad a construction one were to put on the word "advertising". But I believe most would recognize that a public well-informed by factual advertising is better able to utilize existing government programs, better able to judge the wisdom of the programs, and is better able to make its representations through elected members or in whatever manner they desire. So I think that is a pretty good argument in support of the idea that governments have the responsibility to advertise.

I think the message of the young hon. member for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Beatty) is not a very constructive one.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Regan: What bothers me about it, Mr. Speaker, and what bothers me sometimes in this House, is those who think we are here with the task of carrying on a political election for all the time we are elected members. I do not believe that is the case. I think the parties should fight each other for election at election time with great vigour, and that the responsibility of a Member of Parliament at other times is somewhat higher.

Mr. Blaikie: You are a real democrat.

Mr. Regan: I am glad to have that endorsement. What bothers me about this particular subject is those people who say one thing when they are in government, and something totally opposite when they are in opposition. I say this in relation to the young member who has just spoken, because he had some responsibility in relation to advertising during the interim government, which government did not stop advertising. That government gave no indication that it did not feel government should advertise. It continued to advertise. So what does he do? He comes here and tries to pick out individual ads and how they are applied, and use that as a reason to say that this government is different from his government and other governments with respect to advertising.

He says these are hard times and therefore government should not be advertising. Does he feel, for instance, with the tremendous amount of money spent advertising tourism in this country by the Government of Canada, which brings immense returns to the economy and employment, that if times are difficult we should shut down the advertising? I am not sure that that is his position, but it seems to be the one he expresses.

Then, of course, on the basis of having had some responsibility in government for advertising—for eight months—he sets himself up as an advertising expert. I am far from being an expert—

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Regan: —but I happen to believe that the job of the person responsible is to use the advice of experts in that field as in other fields. The hon. member comes in here and says: My goodness, I have discovered that there is a billboard which just says "Making Canada Work" and it shows a woman working and says "Employment Canada" down below. Therefore, he says, that is all this ad is conveying. The hon. member shows his absolute ignorance of the subject of advertising. He does not look at the entire program. Any man who has been in the advertising business for any period of time will tell him that a comprehensive program using a slogan ties together the radio, newspaper and television ads with the billboard. The billboard plays a very important role of jogging a person's memory about a message conveyed by television in more detail, or in newspapers.

Mr. McDermid: The land is strong.

Mr. Regan: Either he does not know that or he does not care, because he thinks the game is to come into Parliament and when in opposition to scream about advertising. I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I think we have a lot of pretty serious