

3. The programming director should be responsible for the production and direction of the broadcasting of the House of Commons, subject to the overall direction of the Monitoring Committee of the House of Commons.

“... we could develop guidelines or offer somewhat greater scope to the television crew to do shots of the person who is speaking, including the Chamber as a whole, if the person is seen while he or she is speaking.”

Herb Gray, M.P.,
House Leader of the Official Opposition

The present guidelines for the televising of the House of Commons are unnecessarily strict. The camera is allowed to show only the person recognized by the Speaker, or the Speaker. Camera shots are restricted to the torso and head of the person speaking, and the microphone picks up only his or her voice. Broadcasting of the proceedings of the House of Commons was described as an “electronic Hansard.” As such, it was expected that attention would be devoted to the actual speakers.

The Committee asked Members of Parliament and others whether the formal guidelines which presently exist for cameras should be relaxed. The rationale for removing camera restrictions would be to present a truer picture of the House.

Strict rules for the cameras have prevented certain events from being shown, and the full flavour of the House of Commons from being conveyed. For instance, the cameras are unable to show a member crossing the floor, either to join another party, or to congratulate another member. Similarly, if a group of MPs were to walk out in protest, this could not be shown by the cameras, although it would presumably be newsworthy. Recently, when King Hussein of Jordan addressed the House, the cameras were unable to show the invited guests and dignitaries who had gathered to hear him while awaiting the arrival of the official party. The Speaker provided to the Committee a paper outlining a number of possibilities for televising the proceedings of the House; a copy is attached as Appendix III.

Strict camera guidelines have the effect of providing a distorted vision of the House of Commons. Broadcasting should enable Canadians to see their elected representatives in action, warts and all. Television should not distort the proceedings, but neither should it be used to create an artificial picture of what is going on. The producer must never trivialize the proceedings or sensationalize the House. He or she must insist on dignity and proper shots that reflect the proceedings.

It should be noted that other legislatures which have permitted television have not imposed such rigid guidelines on the cameras. Similarly, events such as first ministers'