

The Disabled

comprehensive manner on such an important subject that we can digest and work with.

Finally, because I think I will be abusing the time of the House if I go on much further, I do compliment the Hon. Member for bringing forward this matter this afternoon. I would like to reiterate that it is my commitment, along with the rest of the Members of Parliament, to ensure services to the disabled not only as they are now in an improved situation but that the whole process be accelerated so that all handicapped people will participate more fully in the mainstream of life.

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying in addressing Bill C-675 earlier this day, it is not every day that I get up to endorse the essence of a Bill or a motion proposed by one of my colleagues in the New Democratic Party. Today I get to do it twice.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): The Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. Deans) will never understand this. I want to speak in support of the principle of the motion moved by the Hon. Member for the Beaches (Mr. Young). This is a totally non-partisan issue and that does bring to mind the work done by our late colleague, the Hon. Walter Dinsdale. I want to pay tribute to him on behalf of all Members of this House because of his work of love. Indeed, his entire life was dedicated to those Canadians who suffer from handicaps and disabilities.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): That work is now being carried on by my colleague the Hon. Member for Oxford (Mr. Halliday), and my colleague the Hon. Member for Waterloo (Mr. McLean), who has replaced the late Mr. Dinsdale on the committee.

I was looking into a little bit of the background earlier today on the hearing impaired, and I was surprised to learn that hearing loss is the most common form of disability, that 1.5 million Canadians have some degree of hearing impairment, that 200,000 Canadians are profoundly deaf and 550,000 have difficulties hearing in both ears. A quarter of a million people wear hearing aids and an equal number of individuals could use them. Current demographic trends suggest that more individuals will be using them as the population grows older. I apologise for using notes on these statistics, but they are startling and I wanted to make sure that I was correct.

● (1640)

With the permission of Hon. Members, I would like to digress for a moment to illustrate how important the problem of the hearing impaired has become. In terms of one particular project in my riding, a lady by the name of Jacqueline Harbour has started a school for hearing-ear dogs. The problem of the hearing impaired in Canada is as significant as, if not more so, those with visual difficulties. They can be treated

in much the same way as the blind who are provided with seeing-eye dogs. I will refer to the work of Mrs. Harbour in greater detail on a future occasion, but it is really incredible to see the dog actually taking the place of the human ear and alert the hearing impaired to the telephone ringing, the doorbell sounding or anything of this nature around the home. This project deserves national attention, and I will be giving it that attention at the earliest opportunity.

In this particular motion we are talking specifically about telephones. The progress report of the Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped issued in June, 1982 made three basic yet very important recommendations. Recommendation No. 56 read:

Reduce telephone rates for hearing impaired persons who need special TDD (teletypewriter) equipment.

Recommendation No. 57 read:

Special telephone equipment for disabled persons be provided under basic monthly charge.

Recommendation No. 58 read:

Equip federal offices with special telephone equipment for disabled persons.

These recommendations were made to enhance the accessibility of the hearing impaired to general communications. They would also enhance the already valuable role played by these Canadians and would be in accordance with the Charter of Rights that was passed by the House.

However, there is a larger international situation of which the committee should be aware if and when it begins to deal with the issue, and I hope it is soon. The United States adopted accessibility standards—90 per cent of telephone receivers in that country are compatible. We do not have a large number of U.S. manufactured phone sets in the Canadian marketplace, but in all probability they would have a telecoil.

CRTC Decision No. 82-14 to allow business and home subscribers to purchase their own equipment has opened up the market. As a result we are receiving imports from Japan, Korea, Italy, Singapore, Poland and Sweden. Needless to say, these units may not be compatible. If we impose this new standard, it may be seen as a non-tariff trade barrier and we may be open to retaliation. If we want to explore international markets for our technology, we must cultivate these trade barriers. However, there is an excellent argument that we should have standards in place as we do for cars, medical devices and so on.

There may be some interim solutions which could be proposed to the non-compatible phone units being sold in Bell Canada territory where, incidentally, two-thirds of the hearing impaired reside. For example, we could put labels on these units indicating that they are not compatible or they do not work with a T-switch on hearing aids. That was suggested by the Canadian Hearing Society. Perhaps these temporary solutions could be considered while legislation requiring these units to be compatible is being discussed and studied.

The problem faced by my predecessor and I in this role as critic for communications, when discussing modifications that