

Government Orders

This government is continuing its inaction by stating that it is consulting the Canadian public on many issues. This is also true of parks. Currently in Alberta and B.C. mountain parks alone there are numerous reviews including the four mountain parks five-year plan update which separates studies for Banff, Jasper, Yoho and Kootenay. There is also the Bow Valley study in Banff, including a two-year moratorium on development. There are operational reviews for the townsites of Waterton, Jasper, Wasagaming, Waskesiu, Field and Lake Louise; a study concerning the closure of the Jasper and Banff airstrips; an action plan update for Lake Louise and a study concerning the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway through the parks. This is symptomatic of a government wrapped up in reviewing, discussing and studying. But is it really listening? I ask this question over and over. The focus of all of these studies is directed at environmental concerns, not the cultural benefits of our national parks.

I would like to address another major challenge facing Parks Canada: funding, administration and fiscal accountability. According to figures obtained from the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Parks Canada 1993-94 budget shows expenditures of \$170.2 million and revenue of \$32.5 million. According to the mathematics I learned in school, this leaves a shortfall of \$137.7 million. In these economic times it is impossible to understand how Parks Canada can maintain its administration and operation, let alone preserve our parklands for generations to come. Without a strategic and long range plan sustaining the parks at current levels it becomes more and more impossible for a cash strapped government.

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As has been demonstrated time and again there is a lack of access to information about specific parks expenditures. For instance, the residents of Waterton National Park have been invited to participate in an operational review. This review is based on three suppositions. First, those receiving government provided services should pay an appropriate and fair amount. Second, Canadians should receive fair market value for the use of their land and assets. Third, subsidies should be eliminated. This sounds like more do nothing mumbo-jumbo from the Liberal government.

At a public meeting in Waterton residents were informed that the annual budget of their community was \$750,000 while only \$75,000 was generated. It is astounding. The community is willing to pay its fair share. In fact they welcome the opportunity to be more involved in the decision making and operations of their community. However they have not been given access to examine the expenditures to determine where the money is

being spent and where it can be saved. The 85 year round residents are being asked to make up a shortfall of nearly \$700,000 without full and detailed information. Isn't it a ludicrous expectation?

These residents are questioning such things as the necessity of having the equivalent of 59 year round employees within their small park of 505 square kilometres and annual visitors numbering only 330,000. Meanwhile their public school is now closed, and I saw this. Their children will have to be bused out of the park to get an education. Their swimming pool has been closed and there are grass and weeds growing through the cracks. This is stark evidence that community input has not been heard.

Yet Parks Canada's vision statement clearly states: "Stewardship of historic and heritage areas is a shared responsibility. Canadian citizens must be more aware and involved in decision making and in the delivery of heritage programs".

On August 3, 1994 the Minister of Canadian Heritage announced that he was looking at the matter of user fees for Parks Canada facilities. It is not clear from the documents I have seen what exactly the minister is targeting with these user fees. Parks Canada is already spending more than \$170 million per year on national parks alone, not including other heritage sites.

Raising visitors' fees should only be considered when the government demonstrates its willingness to open its books and show Canadians where their money is being spent. Anything less becomes another unjustifiable tax grab and a government that is casting its greedy eyes to the already empty pockets of taxpayers.

In all my speeches to the House from the issue of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to multiculturalism and other heritage issues I have spoken of the need for fiscal responsibility and sound management practices. In closing I would ask some questions. Are we prepared to pay more to maintain our parks, or will our government continue to fund the parks system blindly and without accountability? How much more can the taxpayers of the country afford?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on second reading of Bill C-53 to continue my opposition to it.

In my first speech, I reminded this House of some important considerations. First, I said that Quebec's problems are due to the very nature of the federal system since the federal system in Canada completely ignores the reality of Quebec. The original intention of Confederation has been gradually replaced by a strong central government in which one of the founding nations no longer has anything but the status of a small minority.