

One other thing we could do with this television channel is string two or three committee hearings together so viewers could see a progression of witnesses address an issue, unless they put it on a Sunday morning or Sunday afternoon and committees could be kept in the can, as it were, and strung together so viewers could see the full debate all at once and be better able to understand what we as a House of Commons are doing.

• (1220)

I concurred in this report, but it was my feeling that we should allow the decision-making authority to go to the consortium itself, subject to the review of the monitoring committee or the privileges and elections committee because, in my view, it is the professionals who are non-partisan who can best make the decision whether it should be a news conference or a committee of the House, what is topical today, what is hot today, what is of great interest to Canadians. We as a committee felt that we needed a little bit more control as things work themselves out and it should be the chairs of the committees who make that decision.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Madam Speaker, I have been following this discussion and debate rather carefully. I want to raise a question and I want a confirmation or denial. I believe that I can get a confirmation of the following.

My understanding is that the most important thrust here, the bottom line, is that we are trying to bring Parliament closer to the people. We are trying to help Canadians understand, perhaps better than they do now, the whole question of governance as it pertains to the nation, and how decisions are made. We want to help citizens understand government, understand what it does and how it does it, perhaps even better than they do now so that together we can help build a nation. We can improve governance and decision-making generally.

Is that a reasonably accurate description of perhaps the most important objective that we are trying to reach here.

Mr. Thorkelson: I would say that is true. We would like to help Canadians understand government. When Canadians turn on their TV and view this channel, they are only seeing one-third or one-quarter of what goes on on Parliament Hill and in Ottawa.

A lot of important decisions are taken at committees. We can see the development and the thinking evolve as

Routine Proceedings

committee members hear witnesses, as they themselves are influenced, as they sift through information. Canadians should have access to that information.

News conferences are held and people will see a 20-second clip or a five-second clip on national television that evening. If they were able to see even 15 minutes of that hour-long news conference and the questions asked and how reporters were trying to elicit that information, their understanding of that one issue and their understanding of the process would be so much greater.

The process not only means committees and the House, but political conventions, conferences, and interest groups trying to bring pressure on government. I would agree totally that we want to foster a greater understanding of governance of this country and an appreciation of Canada as a nation from sea to sea. I believe this could be a fantastic instrument of national unity.

Mr. Steve Butland (Sault Ste. Marie): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise and report on the report from the elections and privileges committee entitled "Watching the House at Work". I am sure some Canadians out there would wonder about the title of this particular report.

Before we get any great illusions as to the number of people watching us, this Environics poll taken in 1986, somewhat dated, shows that 86 per cent of people favour parliamentary television; only 13 per cent are opposed.

If we take that poll one step further, we find that 3 per cent of the population watch our channel each and every day. I guess we would call those the political junkies of Canada. Ten per cent watch it once a week and 37 per cent watch it occasionally. I guess that leaves about 50 per cent who never watch it at all. So let us be assured that we are no competition for the Cosby show, Rosanne Barr, or even any of the soaps.

Nevertheless, it would appear that from all the reports from the MPs, the vast majority said it must continue. Many had reservations about relaxed or loosened camera coverage of the House. Very few feel it should be removed altogether, but there were some members of Parliament who said there should be no coverage whatsoever in the House. I suggest that Canadians would not accept that kind of decision. It is here now and has been for 12 years. Canadians are used to it. If we took a step back, I am sure citizens would accuse us of doing