

Bell Canada Act

six-month advance payment. I wondered, since it was refused in committee, whether the Minister would come back and accept the principle that advance payment was not necessary and that a deposit should not be required unless determined by regulations or directions from the CRTC. Therefore I am pleased that my suggestion has been accepted with respect to the credit practices of the company being set by the Commission. After all, this is a monopoly service and the customers will certainly not run away or move to avoid Bell Canada. I am sure they are pleased to pay their monthly bills. Unfortunately, most people do not have that type of lump sum to put up front. I am pleased to support the amendment of the Minister, Motion No. 3A, which is really my motion. I am glad I have inspired him along the way.

With respect to Motion No. 1, which refers to the furnishing of the service, I suggest that furnishing the service should be an obligation and that it should be at an affordable cost. If the service is being furnished, does a telephone come with that service? Or is there just a wire and somehow or other one must speak to the wind? In conjunction with furnishing a service a usable telephone should be supplied at a minimal cost. It should be easily accessible to the parties concerned. What does one do if one is elderly and cannot go down to the local boutique? In other words, how does one obtain a telephone? Therefore furnishing the service indicates that we want the service furnished at an affordable price and that in this respect the local ratepayer will be considered, not just in light of long distance telephone rates. The intent of this amendment is to give all reasonable consideration to the subscriber at the local level. If that is the intent, then I hope the Minister will give serious consideration to this amendment.

● (1240)

[Translation]

Mrs. Claudy Mailly (Gatineau): Mr. Speaker, in Clause 6 of the Bill it says that Bell Canada has an obligation to provide services to customers that it shall—

(a) furnish the service;

And also:

—furnish telephones of the latest improved design then in use by the Company in the municipality or territory.

Mr. Speaker, in the riding of Gatineau and in the Outaouais region generally, we have a situation that is totally unacceptable. Our telephones are indeed of the latest improved design, but we cannot use them to call numbers in our own municipalities without incurring long distance charges.

I have asked Bell Canada to abolish long distance charges between the communities of Thurso and Gatineau, between Buckingham and Gatineau and even between certain streets in the municipality of Gatineau, where there is a long distance charge for phoning across the street!

The Company was understanding and made an application to the CRTC to change the criteria that stand in the way of getting rid of these long distance charges that divide our

families and are a burden on our small business people who, whenever they receive calls from or put calls through to their suppliers, run up incredible bills, and sometimes it costs as much as \$100 a month for a family that wants to keep in touch with people across our riding.

The CRTC answered that it would postpone a decision on this request until the fall, because it did not agree with the way Bell Canada was going to frame its request. Bell Canada says that in order to charge my constituents and other ridings and communities in Canada, local instead of long distance rates, it would cost \$150 million, and that this \$150 million was going to be spread over all subscribers, including those who do not pay long distance charges when they call another number within the same community.

The CRTC felt it was not fair to spread the cost of changing the criteria, just to enable hundreds of people to call each other within the same community without paying long-distance charges.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation will give the CRTC a right to monitor a number of matters where it has been somewhat difficult in the past for the Council to obtain information.

I was therefore suggesting to the CRTC, which will now secure that right under the Bill, that rather than asking Bell Canada to completely reorganize its service in order to eliminate the need for long distance calls between communities which already have a common interest but are not adjacent and that being the term that prevents us from doing away with it, that rather than attempting such a complete reorganization, they should tell Bell Canada which, according to recent statistics I have seen, had possibly the largest profits of all major Canadian corporations, to absorb part of the cost of doing away with long distance tolls in the Ottawa Valley communities. Because the situation is absolutely unfair.

On the Ontario side, taxpayers can make calls from Cumberland right up to Ottawa. There are almost no communities with long distance tolls. But on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River, there are long distance tolls for calling people living across the street. There are long distance tolls between Buckingham and Gatineau. Where do you suppose people in Buckingham will be getting their supplies and services? They call Ottawa because there is no long distance toll.

How is it possible to have cohesion in our area?

So, in conclusion, I recommend to the CRTC, rather than postponing the elimination of long distance tolls in the Ottawa region, to require Bell Canada to absorb the cost of that elimination, according to the schedule that was established in January when Bell Canada filed its application with the CRTC.

Moreover, I would also recommend to the CRTC that if, under this Bill, they obtain a right to monitor Bell Canada's operations, wider powers than before, that they use that right to ensure that the Corporation really meets its obligation as provided in the legislation to furnish telephone service