

Government Orders

We have heard many speakers on this bill talk about the dawning of the so-called information age and what that will mean for you and me today and for our children tomorrow. Although no one can be sure about the future we can all be certain that adaptations will be the prerequisite for success.

With respect to the future viability of our cultural sector this government is committed to ensuring that Canadian content services have a strong visible and audible presence on the information highway.

For me, debate at second reading has proved both interesting and telling in this matter, interesting because of the breadth and scope of the issues discussed and telling because it has pointed out the fundamental differences in the perspectives of this government and members of the opposition parties.

The negativism expressed by those in opposition to this bill is in stark contrast to the confidence shown by the government in tabling this legislation and in the various pieces of legislation that will establish the other large new departments.

Never has our national heritage and its expression been more important than at the present time. The government's actions in this regard are founded on a sense of optimism for the future, yes, optimism in continuing ingenuity, skill, and energy of our fellow Canadians toward ensuring a thriving and prosperous future for this country.

I want to assure each and every Canadian that they have an elected government that is committed to serving them in the most effective, efficient way possible.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me this time and I look forward to early passage of this legislation.

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak again to Bill C-53 which establishes the Department of Canadian Heritage. In my first address to the House on this bill I discussed the issues of multiculturalism and copyright. Today I wish to address the issue of the national parks system. Yes, these inherently different areas all fall within the responsibility and jurisdiction of Canadian heritage.

• (1555)

I continue to be puzzled as to why Parks Canada is now part of the Department of Canadian Heritage. While it is very true that our national parks provide educational opportunities to all Canadians to learn about Canadian history and culture, our 36 national parks and national park reserves across the country seem to me to have greater environmental importance. Prior to the introduction of this bill by the previous government, Parks Canada had been part of the Department of the Environment.

Parks Canada states in its "Guiding Principles and Operational Policy" that it contributes to "an understanding and collective sense of Canada's identity as well as a shared sense of pride. We celebrate this rich heritage through national historic sites, national parks and park reserves, heritage railways stations, historic canals, marine conservation areas, heritage rivers, federal heritage buildings and historical markers".

Parks Canada has redefined its purpose in the following manner: "To fulfil national and international responsibilities in mandated areas of heritage recognition and conservation and to commemorate, protect and present both directly and indirectly places which are significant examples of Canada's cultural and natural heritage in ways that encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of this heritage while ensuring long term ecological and commemorative integrity".

In 1930 the National Parks Act proclaimed that: "The parks are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment and such parks shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations".

Over time the mandate and purpose of Parks Canada has moved toward the greater emphasis on environmental protection and less emphasis on public enjoyment. By its placement in the Department of Canadian Heritage, I have to ask the question: Will the environmental concerns of Parks Canada become lost within the heritage issues?

Throughout its history, Parks Canada has been faced with the same challenges, balancing development while protecting and preserving the ecosystem and funding, administration and fiscal accountability of the parks system.

I wanted to know more about the concerns of the people who live in the townsites and earn their livelihoods from parks. Our mountain parks are world renowned and people travel from the four corners of the globe to visit them. The economic value of this tourism is in the hundreds of millions of dollars and impact directly on hundreds of jobs.

This summer I met with people from Banff, Jasper and Waterton National Park. The single largest challenge facing parks today is balancing development of parks while protecting the parks' ecosystem. There is no question that Parks Canada contributes to Canadian culture and heritage. Development of the park resources ensures that visitors to the parks are able to fully understand and appreciate our natural and cultural heritage. This development also ensures the livelihoods of those who live and work there. Since their business is based on visitors' appreciation of the natural wonders of our parks, protection of the sensitive ecosystem is as important to business people in the parks as it is to environmentalists.