

## CRTC

**Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the federal cabinet will do something it has never done before. It will issue a cabinet directive overturning a CRTC decision on direct to home satellite television at the specific request of Power Corp.

In fact Power Corp. went so far as to say that it would withdraw its bid if the cabinet did not rule in its favour. It is amazing what one can accomplish when one has friends or fathers-in-law in high places.

My question is for the Prime Minister. If the government felt so strongly about opening satellite television to competition, why was it not done through the appropriate channels and why is Power Corp. running the show?

**Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the usual critic is not here. Perhaps she would understand the process a little better. The hon. member will know—

**Some hon. members:** Order.

**The Speaker:** We have been away for a little while and probably have forgotten that we do not make reference to when members are here or not here. I would ask the hon. minister to keep that in mind when answering.

**Mr. Manley:** Actually, Mr. Speaker, I am never quite sure when the members are here or when they are not here.

The hon. member should be aware the concerns the government expressed about the order the CRTC issued last summer were precisely along the lines of the question he puts. The CRTC authorized the consortium to initiate a direct to home satellite service in Canada without issuing a licence and without any public transparency process, by issuing an exemption order which has the effect, as the hon. member should know, of creating a monopoly in this service in Canada.

• (1425)

If the Reform Party is in favour of a monopoly in services and opposed to a transparent licensing system then let it say so. That seems to be the implication of the question.

**Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre, Ref.):** I guess, Mr. Speaker, I get to see arrogance in its visual form.

The Reform Party favours open competition and a firm policy that safeguards the best interest of the country and Canadians. However, if questions are being raised about the propriety of the deal the government has no one to blame but itself. Power Corp. said jump, and the cabinet and the Prime Minister asked how high by using special powers to overturn the CRTC original decision. This was all being done behind closed doors. Certainly

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consumers may benefit in the end but the end does not justify the means.

My supplementary question is for the minister. Will he assure the House that any further decisions on the direct to home satellite industry will be taken in full public view and not behind closed doors at special cabinet meetings?

**Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is hard to avoid being accused of arrogance when the member's question is full of factual errors.

The reality is that we invited the panel of experts to conduct an open and transparent process. All the submissions received by the review panel were publicized with time for public response to the submissions, unlike the issue of the exemption order in the first place.

If cabinet decides that it will accept the recommendations of the review panel it would do so in a statutory and transparent way by referring such an order to the House of Commons and to the Senate for review over a period of 40 days. That is what the law provides. It is entirely open and entirely transparent. If we decide to do so, the member and other members of his party will be most welcome to make their submissions well known both on competition as well as on the future of DTH services.

**Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, with the cabinet's unprecedented use of special powers to overturn a CRTC decision, which contradicts the red book promise of open government, the federal government is now becoming more powerful and more secretive.

For instance, the regulatory efficiency act will give the cabinet power to exempt companies from regulations through special private compliance plans. The potential for abuse is staggering. Canadians should be driving the country's agenda, not cabinet and special interest groups. The system must be transparent.

Will the government scrap the regulatory efficiency act immediately and keep power in the hands of Parliament where it belongs?

**Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, again the preamble to the question misses the point of what is proposed in the issuance of a direction to the CRTC. Yes, it is the first time but the act was passed only a short time ago; it is one of the first opportunities to exercise the power. However it is very carefully circumscribed in the Broadcasting Act. Therefore it is important for us, if we make that choice, to do so in a way that complies with the act, that is transparent and that is open. This is the essence of what we are trying to accomplish with respect to the order.

As far as the regulatory efficiency act is concerned the member is entitled to engage in debate about it, but he should understand that one of the objectives of the act is to ensure that