

*Government Orders*

It seems to me there is a special relationship between Canadians, aboriginal Canadians and immigrant Canadians, and the environment. This is expressed through Parks Canada and so it is part of our heritage.

In listening to various speakers regarding this bill, both those on the government side and colleagues in other parties, what has struck me is the fundamental nature of feelings that have been expressed. Truly this new department, the Department of Canadian Heritage, has responsibility for areas that strike a deep and resonant chord in all Canadians.

The Department of Canadian Heritage—I must admit it is a new name, but a new name that I like—is a department that is concerned about all those things that make us what we are, those things that set us apart in the global community. Anyone who takes the time cannot fail to be impressed by the range and diversity of the new department's program areas.

I do not intend to list each of these areas of endeavour, but I do want to note some of the major sectors for the benefit of those who have been following this debate. I have already mentioned Parks Canada. In addition the new department has responsibility for the arts, broadcasting, heritage conservation, cultural industries including film, video, sound recording and book publishing.

It is also responsible for the federal programs dedicated to the promotion of official languages; the pursuit of excellence in amateur sport, Mr. Speaker, which interests you and me greatly; the promotion of our cultural diversity and the encouragement of the full and open participation of every Canadian in society.

In short, the Department of Canadian Heritage is active in areas that have as their common objective the promotion of Canadian identity. I think everyone listening to this can relate to one or another of those areas of interest which this new department has that I have mentioned. In my riding of Peterborough, and I have only been a member of Parliament for a short time, I have already had personal discussions with constituents about virtually every one of those areas of heritage activity that I have mentioned.

As one can see from the proposed legislation we are discussing here, this bill will give sanction to a federal department that has programs that touch each and every Canadian. The department is a rich amalgam of sectors. Indeed I believe that the Minister of Canadian Heritage has the privilege to direct one of the government's most exciting and challenging new portfolios.

The word heritage means different things to different people. To me one thing is clear. Particularly this year at this particular time in this House one thing is clear: Our heritage matters and the department dedicated to it are necessarily of great importance at this time, at any time, to this country. I have no doubt whatever that the new Department of Canadian Heritage will

prove to be an able and vital player in the federal arena as it goes about carrying out the responsibilities conferred upon it by Parliament.

Although the bill before us says a technical purpose, confirming as it does the creation of the department in statute, to me it nonetheless represents a far-sighted and enlightened step on the part of the government, a step that will benefit our children and for which I think they will thank us. In my view this department will help ensure that Canada remains a country that others will look to as an example, a nation built on its aboriginal foundations that is confident enough in its identity to embrace the peoples of the world, not only accepting their cultural differences, but welcoming and acknowledging them for what they are, living examples of human expression that link us to the past, link us to the rest of the world and provide us with the foundation and certainty necessary to face the future with confidence.

• (1550)

I have taken note of concerns expressed by some members about the rationale for placing responsibility for broadcasting within Canadian heritage while the telecommunications policy will reside in the new Department of Industry. These members pretend to worry about whether the government will be hamstrung by this arrangement and therefore be incapable of action in these two vital fields. I can only say the truth is far from that.

Canadians can be assured that both departments are co-operating, teaming their efforts and finding innovative and effective ways to satisfy their respective mandates.

We need look no further than the recent joint announcement of my colleagues the Minister of Canadian Heritage and the Minister of Industry regarding the government's request to the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, to seek input and report on a number of regulatory and policy matters relevant to the development of the information highway.

Both ministers recognize that the interests of all parties, consumers, business, creators, in short everyone, will best be served by an open and transparent information gathering process.

Accordingly the government has asked the CRTC to consider such issues as the regulations in new services, the contributions to the objectives of the broadcasting act that these new services would be required to make, and the transition to fair competition between the various players on the information highway, particularly the cable television and telephone companies.

It is all too easy to sit and wring our hands and worry that the two departments will not be able to deliver on their mandates. Those that do so have their blinders on and refuse to see what can be done or accomplished if the will and effort are there.