

Government Orders

give the CBC considerable commercial flexibility. In turn, this flexibility will result in operating savings in the long run.

[English]

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the member opposite for her spirited defence of mother corporation.

I think most Canadians grew up with CBC and view it as an integral part of our lives. However, I have a problem with CBC particularly over the last few years. I also have a problem with CBC as a purchaser of advertising from CBC, but that is another story.

I wonder if the member opposite would comment on this question and I will phrase it this way. The CBC is neither fish nor fowl. It tries to be a private broadcaster but it is a public broadcaster. It tries to be a public broadcaster and it is caught up in being a private broadcaster.

I wonder if the member opposite has given any thought to the CBC's paring itself down to a more affordable operation or a model, striving for excellence using the BBC as a model, BBC-1 or BBC-2, running a commercial free network but not in competition with the private broadcasting networks.

Ms. Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, the Reformer is on record as wanting to privatize part or all of CBC. I thank the hon. member for his question.

As some make this recommendation they also claim that Canadians would be better served by the privatization of CBC. All they would succeed in doing by imprudent budget cuts is waste much of the money that remains spent on the CBC because it will not be commercially viable and its product would deteriorate to irrelevance.

Closing the CBC or severely cutting funding would be to dam the last river of Canadian culture and leave it in effect as a stagnant pool. Certainly if the hon. member has suggestions to make he may wish to make representation before the CRTC.

The hon. member also said that all Canadians recognize the importance of CBC as a refuge from the mainstream of American sitcoms and documentaries about the civil war or the FBI. As the principal carrier of Canadian content, the CBC does prevent Canadians from being completely culturally disenfranchised.

Regrettably, though, the CBC must continue to suffer the slings and arrows of Reform MPs who were advocating its demise, unfortunately with a very narrow view of what constitutes Canadian culture.

• (1645)

Mr. McClelland: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the hon. member opposite heard what I said when I asked the question. My point was this. Would the CBC not better serve the people of Canada if it were to become a true public broadcaster rather than trying to be a private broadcaster and a public broadcaster? It may necessitate scaling down so that it could go into a commercial free broadcasting mode similar to the BBC. The BBC is world recognized for the quality of its programming.

The point that I would ask the hon. member to consider is that perhaps Access TV for instance in Alberta may be shut down. Why could the programming on Access or TVO not all be put into CBC and CBC become truly a public broadcaster?

Ms. Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member would like to elaborate, when he says that there should be substantial cuts, where these cuts should be made.

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley): Mr. Speaker, I have been sort of struggling with a comment made by the chairman of the CBC on a panel show I watched a few weeks ago.

He made a statement which I believe was just incredible. He said that the CBC should not concern itself with economic viability but rather with delivering a Canadian culture to the Canadian people.

While that may be barely acceptable in traditional economic good times, I hardly think that this is a traditional economic atmosphere that we are enjoying right now. It may be tradition given the history over the last 15 years. It is all very nice to have an outlet or a means of conveying Canadian culture but when the government is borrowing well over \$100 million a day to stay in business, I would ask the minister whether she thinks this is the time to separate our wants from our needs. To have this expensive albatross around our necks at this time is sort of like going downtown to buy a new television set when one does not have any food in the cupboard.

What does the government have in mind in trying to get the CBC on an economically viable basis rather than just a black hole in which to throw money?

Ms. Guarnieri: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the instant promotion but I am a mere parliamentary secretary and not a minister. Thank you anyway.

The hon. member makes the point that there should be more food in the cupboard but to many people culture is a form of food and sustenance. It is the unifying link that binds this country together. The measure that the government has proposed and put on the table before members is very responsible. It is done with a view to ensuring that we are fiscally responsible. The money that we are proposing is money well spent.