

the open, rather than behind closed doors, in view of the terms of reference of the committee which are to restructure the telecommunications industry in this country?

Hon. Jeanne Sauv  (Minister of Communications): The suspicions about this committee, Mr. Speaker, seem to lie mainly in the hon. member's mind. I want to reassure the hon. member that it is included in the mandate of this committee that if they feel they have the need to do so, they should be talking to the people in the industry, be they cable operators, broadcasters or even CRTC commissioners.

I understand that having reviewed all the material they had to go through and the different items which they thought they would want to study, they have already asked representatives of industry to meet with them and discuss some of the issues.

Mr. Nowlan: I appreciate the last part of the minister's answer because I, too, am aware of the fact that people who represent industry have been invited to come forward with briefs and, in fact, some individuals have been invited to give briefs. While I appreciate fully the practical impossibility of coming up with some substantive recommendations by February 1, does the minister not feel that there could be a better public discussion and a better stimulation of public debate—which the minister said she would like to see, in her press release of November 30—even within the limits of that timetable, if these people with briefs could come forward in public so that other representative groups could listen to what is said?

This could also help the Clyne committee make up its mind on recommendations to the minister with reference to the Gamma report and the CRAB report. Will the minister and this committee rely on other structural models for the telecommunications industry which have already been prepared by DOC officials and members of her department, and will those models be open to examination by people interested in this field?

Mrs. Sauv : Many of the issues which will be studied by the committee have already been the object of a certain amount of public hearings mainly conducted by the CRTC, so that evidence will be used, obviously, by this committee.

I want to suggest to the hon. member that he should understand that once the committee has brought down its report—which timetable, incidentally, is the end of February—and although the hon. member thinks the deadline is impossible to meet, the committee is not saying it is impossible at this stage and they will try to meet it: it will be the basis of public debate on some of the issues which might require it.

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CULTURAL AFFAIRS

LIBRARY SERVICE FOR HANDICAPPED PERSONS

Mr. David Crombie (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State, to whom I have given notice. I am sure the Secretary of State is aware of the task force report on

library service to the handicapped which was published in January, 1976, and also of the 36 recommendations contained in that report and of the branch of the National Library which was established to implement those recommendations.

● (1452)

I should like to know if the minister is aware of the work of that branch in implementing those recommendations to establish a co-ordinated service for the handicapped people of this country and, if so, does he agree with the decision to axe the program as of March 31?

Hon. John Roberts (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to thank the hon. member for his kindness in giving me notice of the question. The answer to the first part of his question is, yes, I am aware of the matter which he has brought to our attention.

It is not a question of axing an existing program; it is a question of not being able to go forward at the present time with the implementation—which we hope to do in the near future—of a program which does flow, as he correctly said, from recommendations of the committee. One person has been brought on the staff of the National Library to consider ways in which these recommendations might be moved forward. It is now clear that the resources necessary to do so will not be available in the immediate future. There is, therefore, in that sense, not a continuing role for this person to play.

We do hope in the near future to be able to continue with the implementation of the recommendations which were brought forward, recommendations which affect not only the federal but the provincial and municipal levels as well.

Mr. Crombie: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Secretary of State is aware that this program affects 300,000 Canadians who suffer from sight disabilities. I am sure, also, the Secretary of State is aware that every social service ministry in every province of this country has made representations to him to save the existing program as it stands, as has the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

Will the Secretary of State not consider at least maintaining the rather meagre effort that has so far been made and maintain at least the service that is now in place?

Mr. Roberts: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the representations that have been made to me. As I said earlier, it is not a question of removing an existing program. We do attach importance to this and I hope we will be able to proceed with it quickly. But at the present time there is not a program; there is one person advising how we might reach the stage of implementing those proposals. It would still be my intention to do that, but I cannot promise the hon. member to be able to do it within the present financial year.