

Part of the difficulty comes with deciding whether or not to impose what would in effect be a universal tax on all telephone subscribers.

That would be if all telephones were required to have the telecoil implanted in them. It is an argument I have often heard, whether it comes to providing ramps for wheel chair use or removing architectural barriers from federal buildings. Why should the general taxpayer pay to remove those barriers for a small group of disabled Canadians? First, I want to tell Your Honour that that small group of disabled Canadians amounts to something like 10 per cent of the total Canadian population. In fact, it is estimated that there are over two million Canadians who are considered to have disabilities of one form or another. It seems to me that rather than placing those kinds of offhanded, dismissive remarks about why we generally should be caring in our attitude toward those who are disabled, we should be discussing what kind of society we really want. Do we want a society that reduces every problem to dollars and cents and wonders where these dollars and cents are coming from when it comes to human needs? Or are we to be the kind of society that says, "I look after me first, on a dollar and cents basis, and everyone else is on their own"? That is not the kind of society in which I am interested. I daresay that most Hon. Members in the House would share that view. I do not place all that much importance on that kind of an attitude.

But then it comes to a more serious question, where one particular Member says that another problem arises with the effect there could be on international trade from requiring all new telephones to be compatible with hearing aids. Now that telephones no longer have to be leased from the telephone company, which is Bell Canada, such a requirement could be perceived as a non-tariff trade barrier with possible retaliation. I felt the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association presented the classical argument to that classical argument when its Chairman wrote back to this particular Member and said:

—in regard to international trade, I cannot see how such a requirement could be perceived as a non-tariff trade barrier. In particular, such a requirement would in no way give any advantage to domestic industry. International trade agreements do not take away our right to control the performance of devices in the Canadian health, transportation and, in this case, communication system. We already regulate automobile safety, medical device performance, et cetera.

While the Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped was going through public hearings over the last three-year period, we found that there was a readiness, even a willingness on the part of able-bodied Canadians to dismiss out of hand, lightly, problems faced daily by people with disabilities. They used the most specious, spurious arguments to dismiss legitimate claims on society, arguments that they would not dare use with any other group in society. However, they feel quite free to use such arguments against disabled persons simply because the individuals are disabled.

I do not feel that I am being unkind in making that statement, because it is a fact. We found it time and time again, from witnesses who appeared before the committee, relating their experiences with the able-bodied community. I found it quite shameful and shocking. We all did in the committee, and I think that is what made it one of the best committees the House has ever had.

### *The Disabled*

I would argue that the time has come when the House has an excellent opportunity to say that we must play a role in changing the attitudes of society toward the disabled community. Today we are presented with no more of an excellent opportunity than to do it right now. I would ask the House, in all sincerity, to give its support to the motion. If the Government wishes to amend it in such a way as to get the motion into a committee where it can be examined, where we can be assured that the hearing impaired population will receive their due right to have the matter examined closely, I will not object. What I am interested in is ensuring that the question be fully and properly examined. I would ask the House for that support.

• (1620)

**Mr. Jack Masters (Thunder Bay-Nipigon):** Mr. Speaker, may I begin by complimenting the Hon. Member and congratulating him on his choice of issues to raise before the House. It is certainly true that the ability of disabled Canadians to participate in the mainstream activities of Canadian society is something that all of us should be concerned about. I honestly believe that all of us in the House have that same concern and share it as sincerely as the Hon. Member opposite. I would like to assure the Hon. Member that I also absolutely support the idea that disabled Canadians should have access to the same employment, recreation, consumer, educational, community and domestic activities which characterize Canadian society every day.

However, before Members consider the specific issue raised by the Hon. Member, that is, the advisability of introducing legislation that would require all telephones being produced in Canada or imported into Canada to be fully accessible to hearing impaired Canadians, I believe some background information would be in order and helpful.

There are more than 180 telephone companies in Canada. Of course, some are very large like Bell Canada and some are very small. Generally speaking, federal and provincial Governments are responsible for the regulation of the telephone companies under their jurisdiction. Usually, carriers must apply to their regulatory agency, be it the federal agency, a provincial Government public utility board or a municipal council in some cases, for approval of the terms and conditions on which telephone service is provided. Of all these telephone companies, only four are currently subject to regulation by the federal telecommunications regulatory body and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, CRTC. These are Bell Canada, which operates in Ontario, Quebec and part of the Northwest Territories, the British Columbia Telephone Company operating in the Province of British Columbia, Northwestel serving the Yukon and the other part of the Northwest Territories, and Terra Nova Telecommunications, which serves part of Newfoundland.

Traditionally, for all or most of their operations, the telephone companies have carried on business as monopoly service providers within their operating territory. This monopoly extended to the provision of telephones and other devices