

Oral Questions

handled. Today's report proves Mr. Chrétien innocent. I want to ask the minister: Does she still blame Mr. Chrétien?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, it is not a matter of blaming anyone. We are only talking about a report. I will answer all questions before the committee this afternoon, in English and in French.

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I just simply point out that the minister is quoted as saying: "I don't think one should underestimate the impact this could have on their reputations". In other words, we now have another contradiction of a report.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to put this question. In report number two that was made public this morning, there is a very glaring discrepancy between statements that were made in this House in Question Period by the Prime Minister and by other ministers that they had no knowledge of any of these events until April 30. Yet in report number two, and I would like to quote, it states: "Copies of this note were sent to the legislative assistant and the deputy press officer at the Prime Minister's Office, the legislative assistant of the Deputy Prime Minister's office, the legislative assistant at the office of the Government of the Senate, the parliamentary secretary to the Secretary of State for External Affairs," and another long list of the offices of over eight ministers, plus their parliamentary secretaries, plus an armload of officials, all knew about it April 8, even though the first report said it was April 30.

I want to ask the minister, does she still stand by the first report and say that everything in it was the unvarnished truth when her own second report totally contradicts all those statements made in the House?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Some hon. members: Shame, shame.

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston): Mr. Speaker, let the record show that the minister is refusing to answer questions.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member will put his question.

Mr. Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, we now have two versions of what happened in the Al-Mashat case. We have version A that was released by the government on May 13 and we have version B that was released today.

I have a very specific question. In version A it states at page one and I quote: "Mr. Al-Mashat was not considered a valuable source of intelligence and that there was no evidence that his life was in any imminent danger". Version B, at page 7, it says and I quote: "He could provide useful information. In addition his life was considered to be in almost certain danger if he returned to Iraq".

My question to the minister is: Which version is the truth, version A or version B?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, both of these documents are before committee and this morning we were quite prepared to answer all of those questions. We are quite prepared to answer them this afternoon before committee and will be happy to do so at the appropriate time.

Mr. John Nunziata (York South—Weston): Mr. Speaker, version A says at page one that "the defectors committee had decided on March 1 that Mr. Al-Mashat did not qualify as a defector". Version B that was tabled today says that "on March 1 the defectors committee made no final decision concerning his defector status".

Again, I ask the minister, who is consistently refusing to answer questions and it is becoming—

Mr. Speaker: Just a moment. I have allowed the question and the minister can answer it if she wishes. I want to point out to all hon. members and to the public, there is no particular rule, and in fact there is no rule, that says that a minister has to answer questions. If the minister does not answer the question, hon. members can take the reason for that as expressed. In the meantime, I will ask the hon. member to put his question.

Mr. Nunziata: Mr. Speaker, we are entitled to draw whatever conclusions we might.

Mr. Speaker: I would ask the hon. member to put his question.