

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as soon as the plans are finalized, I will be delighted to let everyone know.

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec): Mr. Speaker, are we to understand that the delay in implementation is due to the fact that the minister is unable to convince her colleagues to allocate the funds for centres of excellence for women's health?

[English]

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the centres of excellence for women's health are well on the road to being announced. The terms of reference are being worked on. I will be very happy when they are all completed and the centres are operational across the country.

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LAND ENGINEERING TEST ESTABLISHMENT

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt): Mr. Speaker, for 50 years the land engineering test establishment, known as LETE, has provided one-stop shopping for Canadian army design, development and testing.

In 1993 the chief of defence staff gave LETE a departmental commendation for the completion of 50 high priority tasks supporting peacekeepers in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia.

LETE has saved Canadian soldiers. Will the Prime Minister confirm that in fact there are no real savings in the closure of LETE and that others will fill LETE's crucial role at the potential expense of Canadian lives?

• (1440)

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, in response to his question I assure the hon. member that the Canadian forces have not and will not place their troops at unnecessary risk with inappropriate or unsafe equipment.

As the member knows, the closure of LETE on September 1 will not result in reduced standards or reduced responsiveness to the army's needs.

Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Similkameen—Merritt): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian public is demanding accountability from the government; it wants the facts.

The remarks of the parliamentary secretary do not represent the facts. The facts are that DND is sending some of LETE's sophisticated equipment as a gift to the United States army test and evaluation command, according to their fax which I have in my possession dated September 22.

Will the Prime Minister tell us how defence can justify LETE's closure as a cost cutting saving when we will now have to pay the Americans to use our own equipment?

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the thrust of the hon. member's question is very good. He talks about the facts. I will give him the facts.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Mifflin: If he wants the answer he is going to have to listen. The fact is that the essential activities previously conducted by LETE are being carried out in house and through separate contracts. For contracted work, where feasible, Canadian companies will be considered as a matter of course.

I again assure the House the closure of LETE, if he wants the facts, is expected to save \$11 million annually.

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[Translation]

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PLANS

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. In spite of constant questioning on the part of the official opposition about what his plans really are regarding RRSP taxation, the Minister of Finance still refuses to rule out that possibility. His attitude gives more cause for worry to middle-class taxpayers who rely on RRSPs to prepare a decent retirement for themselves.

I give him yet another chance to put their worried minds to rest. Why does he refuse to undertake not to tax RRSPs, in order not to further increase the tax burden of the middle class?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, one can wonder who is causing worry—I believe this is the third time this week that the hon. member has asked the same question. The Bloc Québécois must have run out of questions to ask.

I was very clear on this issue. If there is to be a pre-budget consultation process, the Minister of Finance must not rule out any possibility or idea. We do not want to hinder the process. I made it very clear that if I answered this question, it would lead to another and another, eventually rendering the consultation process useless. So, I do not intend to comment on specific suggestions because I want to give the people of Canada the chance to tell us what they want.

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, questions arise because there are no clear answers. Does the Minister of Finance not recognize that by taxing RRSPs, he would actually be creating inequity between those workers who have registered retirement savings plans subsidized in part by their employers and those who have none, such as self-employed workers, farmers and fishermen?