

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am sure everyone shares the government's feelings of regret that Senator Castonguay, after a conversation with his doctor, has decided that he is no longer able to continue as Joint Chairman and member of the Joint Committee, in view of the committee's schedule in the coming months. The Steering Committee will meet within the next few days, and of course the decision will be made by the committee. In this connection, the government intends to suggest Senator Gérard Beaudoin as Joint Chairman.

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[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Stan Wilbee (Delta): Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. There are over 200 people in the Upper Fraser Valley who have been diagnosed with an illness that has been termed the enviro disease or somatically, chemically induced dysfunction syndrome.

As pointed out by my colleague from Fraser Valley East on Friday, this is a matter of urgent concern to the residents of that area. With allegations of chemicals leaking into the aquifer in the Fraser Valley and a clustering of cases in that area, can the Minister of National Health and Welfare inform the House of the actions that he and his department have undertaken to address this serious problem.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I have to say first that the officials of the Department of National Health and Welfare have been in touch with the local and provincial health officials since early 1990. After a thorough investigation undertaken by the department, we could not conclude that there was any evidence to show that there was an increase of muscle weakness in the Abbotsford population. However, we are continuing to work with the province and we are prepared to offer all the assistance we can to the province of British Columbia to investigate the issue and determine whether there is any other finding that we have not made so far.

[Translation]

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs. With reference to his referendum legislation, the minister just repeated that majorities would be calculated by province or by region. However, we all know that in the absence of a veto for Quebec, the consent of seven provinces representing 50 per cent of the population is enough to amend the Constitution. Would the minister agree that in that case, the referendum would allow the federal government to impose its own offers on Quebec, even if Quebec turns them down?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (President of the Privy Council and Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am not here to respond to the hon. member's assumptions.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, one of the assumptions made recently by the minister was that he would not use the legislation he will ask the House to adopt, which means more or less that he is going to buy a gun, buy the ammunition, put his finger on the trigger but isn't going to shoot. And on top of that, the government has had some Faustian dealings with the Leader of the Official Opposition.

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How can the minister expect Quebecers to trust the intentions of a government that has just made a pact with the author of the 1982 conspiracy?

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[English]

CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

Mr. Brian L. Gardiner (Prince George—Bulkley Valley): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister responsible for CMHC.

Tomorrow in Vancouver the issue of the restructuring of the Quintette coal mine in northeastern B.C. is back in the courts. To date the federal government has instructed CMHC's mortgage companies to vote against the restructuring and yet the department has refused to release the legal opinion for this position.