

Mr. Forrestall: Mr. Chairman, my question did not have anything to do with that at all. I will put it very directly. How much money has been diverted in the last three years to the identification and correction of learning disabilities in children?

Mr. Axworthy: I would have to get the precise amount which might have been allocated for that particular purpose. We do not have that information available now. I will find it for the hon. member.

M. Forrestall: I appreciate the minister's response. While he is at it, perhaps he would ask his officials for an opinion as to the dollars saved. If he does not mind, I would invite the minister to respond to that question in the form of a letter which, with his permission, I intend to distribute among the people in this country who are concerned about the identification and correction of learning disabilities and the dollar savings which can be achieved through the early and adequate addressing of this major problem, not only in Canada but in the entire world.

During the Clark administration, the then minister of immigration, Mr. Atkey, responded to requests from farm communities in central and eastern Canada respecting migrant farm labourers at the time of harvesting and what not. In response to repeated demands, the government of the day removed the existing quota and allowed migrant workers to come into the country. It seemed to work out fairly well. These workers came principally from the Caribbean and Mexico to meet the demands of our rural communities. While they were here, of course, they were required to make contributions to the Canada Pension Plan and other contributory funds. When they returned to their own countries, they were able to make application for the return of some of those contributions, because under normal circumstances there was no way they could put in the required number of years to qualify, and indeed they were not eligible to draw Canada Pension benefits because they were not Canadians. It would seem only natural that their contributions should be returned to them. The difficulty is twofold—first, because of the removal of the quota the numbers have increased considerably; second, the processing of applications is so slow and lengthy that very few migrant workers bother to seek the return of their contributions. As I understand it, according to the liaison officer for the Windward Islands, the process is lengthy and complex, and indeed, money is charged for the processing of these applications. I know this subject matter is under discussion at certain levels within the minister's department. Has the minister reached any conclusion with respect to it? If we are encouraging people to come into our country to perform menial, hard, back-breaking labour in our vineyards and harvesting other crops for our benefit, perhaps we should have the courtesy not to take money from them, particularly when they can never hope realistically to gain any advantage from their contributions. What is the minister's attitude with respect to this? Does he not believe that perhaps it is time to take a second look at this area, in the interests of continuing to attract migrant

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labour which we very desperately need on an annual basis? Should we not stop collecting contributions unless they continue to show up year in and year out, in which event there might be another status to consider?

Mr. Axworthy: I must confess to the hon. member that this is the first I have heard of that problem. A month or so ago I met with the ambassadors of the Caribbean countries to discuss a whole range of issues related to foreign agricultural workers coming into the country. They did not raise that issue with me. Perhaps it is a matter which falls more under the Department of National Revenue since it involves the collection of funds. Certainly I will take it under advisement. I will raise it with the Minister of Finance or the Minister of National Revenue. I intend to meet with the Caribbean ambassadors every three or four months. I will raise it with them at the next meeting to see if it is a major problem, and I will attempt to get back to the member on this issue.

Mr. Forrestall: Mr. Chairman, I am somewhat appalled. I am not sure what question to ask the minister next. I would like to say to him very personally, as a long-time advocate of paying greater attention to the Caribbean and those island nations, that I welcome the minister's indication that he meets with them every three or four months and intends to continue doing that.

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I would like to move to another area. I apologize to him if he has dealt with it already; if he has, he can refer me to his response. If he has not dealt with it I would like him to elaborate on it. As a very proud parent of four adopted children and one of my own, I would like to ask the minister why it is we continue to militate against parents—not mothers, but parents of either sex—who may have adopted a child. When a baby comes into your home it does not matter, whether it is four or five days old or whether it has been brought there in the normal process or not. It is still loved and requires attention. I am talking about maternity benefits. This is a matter which has been on the order paper, standing in my name, on and off for about 15 years. I wonder if the minister could say a word or two about it.

Mr. Axworthy: Mr. Chairman, the matter of the relationship between adoptive parents and benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act has been brought to my attention several times. I can tell the hon. member I became somewhat curious as to the evolution of the act and how it came to single out maternity benefits. It really had to do with the changes in the act over time so that the inclusion of maternity benefits was seen as a stoppage of work for hospitalization reasons, for health reasons, really for physical disability. It has since evolved to a much broader concept, one which I personally endorse, which is the idea of parental care. There should be a provision in the act recognizing parental care as a qualification for benefit. As part of the review of the Unemployment Insurance Act I have asked the commissioners to look specifically at the question of how the Unemployment Insurance Act