

Oral Questions

municipalities. In Ottawa alone this year their additional cost is \$2.6 million.

[*Translation*]

Madam Speaker, in Quebec, more than 600,000 people are now on welfare, and more than 300,000 are unemployed, which means nearly one million Quebecers. Considering this deplorable situation, how can the government say that its policies are effective? Effective for whom? Isn't it time for the government to change this outrageous policy?

• (1140)

[*English*]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I indicated to another hon. member that transfers to the provinces since we came into office up until last year grew at the rate of 6 per cent on an annualized basis. That has been one of the fastest growing programs in the Government of Canada.

We have not been able to sustain that level so it has had to be constrained somewhat, but the transfers to the provinces continue to grow. Equalization grows on a demand basis. The CAP transfers to the have-not provinces grows on a demand basis and the over-all growth is well in excess of 3 per cent. We are trying to discipline ourselves to contain program expenditures so we can meet the objectives of the Chamber of Commerce of Canada. We are trying to contain those expenditures.

If the hon. member has any suggestions on how we should spend more money, perhaps he can give us some suggestions as to where we will get the money from.

* * *

INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. Robert E. Skelly (Comox—Alberni): Madam Speaker, the minister of Indian affairs boasts of progress in the government's new native agenda and particularly in the area of specific claims. Yet seven months after his specific claims commission was announced and five months after it was set up by Order in Council, none of the commissioners has been appointed but the chairman and not one single aboriginal specific claim has been heard or dealt with by the commission.

Will the minister explain why no commissioners have been appointed and why no claims have been settled in spite of his repeated boasts of progress in this area.

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Madam Speaker, the answer is very simple, but I would like to indicate that since the announcement by the Prime Minister in May of this year, the government has committed \$355 million toward the settlement of specific claims in the next five years. A number of those claims have been completed and I have personally participated in the announcements of those completed claims.

We named the Specific Claims Commissioner, Mr. Harry LaForme, in the month of July and we have been consulting with leadership within the First Nations, particularly the Assembly of First Nations, about the finalization of the aboriginal members of that commission.

As the hon. member knows, it is very important to seek the input and advice of First Nations before these decisions are finalized. For that reason, I will be meeting the national chief of the AFN this afternoon.

Mr. Robert E. Skelly (Comox—Alberni): Madam Speaker, it is also important to listen to the AFN and its consultants and to take its advice when it is offered. It is not only the AFN, but the commission chairman who has been criticizing the minister and his government, not only for the delay in appointing commissioners, but also in the prescriptions that have been made to the commission. In fact, far from reforming the government's outdated specific claims policy, the minister has enshrined it in law in the Order in Council setting up the specific claims commission.

The minister said in a letter to commission chairman Harry LaForme that changes in specific claims policy would have await the royal commission. Is this not exactly the opposite of what the Prime Minister promised when he set up the royal commission in the first place?

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Madam Speaker, I think it is most unfair that the hon. member selects a sentence out of a letter and takes it totally out of context. What the letter said is that should we not make progress with the joint working committee of representatives of the chiefs and government officials on changes to the specific