

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

DEMANDS OF NATIONAL ACTION COMMITTEE

Mr. Walter McLean (Waterloo): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the minister responsible for the status of women. The minister will know that the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, an umbrella committee representing some 150 women's groups from all parts of Canada, met this past weekend in Ottawa. The committee demanded two things. It demanded the minister's resignation as well as the resignation of the executive of the advisory council. Will the minister tell the House what action the government is prepared to take on these recommendations?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, we are prepared to take action on the positive, constructive suggestions which come from any women's group. We have just had a very informative and helpful meeting with the executive of the national action group. The issues the hon. member raised did not come up in quite the way he suggests. I think what that group is far more concerned about is getting on with dealing with the substantive concerns of women and getting away from the kinds of conflicts and allegations which have been so prevalent in the past. We certainly identify with the sentiment that it is time to get on with the real issues affecting women and to get away from some of these false issues.

APPOINTMENTS TO ADVISORY COUNCIL

Mr. Walter McLean (Waterloo): Madam Speaker, obviously one of the substantive issues for women in Canada is the matter of the person who represents them in cabinet, and through their recommendations women are clearly suggesting that there is a lack of credibility there.

The minister will recall that last week he appointed a president and six new members to the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. The National Action Committee, for one, was not consulted before the appointments were made. Did the minister consult, for example, women's business and professional groups, the farm women, the YWCA, Women and the Law, or any other women's groups? In making these appointments of people to advise the government, with whom did the minister consult?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, it may be of some interest to the hon. member, who is concerned about the nature of the appointments, that the woman who is the head of the Farm Women of Canada was appointed to that council.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Axworthy: Furthermore, if he will take a closer look at the qualifications of several of those who were appointed to the

council, he will find that they represent business, education, the Inuit and native communities, and the farm community. They represent the general interests of women. Our criterion is that they be prepared to serve the interests of women, not a particular women's group.

REVIEW OF COUNCIL'S STRUCTURE AND ROLE

Mr. Walter McLean (Waterloo): Madam Speaker, the minister is very clever at avoiding the question. The question was not about the person but the groups who represent women across the country. The minister is saying that he will make decisions on behalf of the women of Canada.

Last week under questioning here in the House the minister said that he preferred to support the advisory council's decision to hold its own internal review of its structure and its role. An internal review is clearly not credible either to this House or to the women of Canada. Will the government, simultaneously with the in-house review, order an external review which can be more independent and more believable?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is quite interested in the questions which were raised last week. I remind him of the answer I gave last week, which was that all along the position of the government has been to support the independence of that council and to allow it the right to make its own decisions about its own affairs. It is important that that independence and autonomy be maintained, and therefore what we are saying is that we gave recommendations and advice and discussed our concerns with the council. The council has decided it will do a review, report its findings to women's groups and consult with them, and then make further recommendations to the government. At that point in time I would be very happy to answer the hon. member's question.

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THE JUDICIARY

QUALIFICATIONS FOR APPOINTMENT OF WOMEN TO SUPREME COURT

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice, and it pertains to recent remarks made by the Prime Minister to the effect that he and the Minister of Justice were unable to find any qualified women in Canada who would merit appointment to the Supreme Court of Canada.

● (1420)

I should like to say to the minister that women have been filling the normal qualifications for appointment to the Supreme Court for years. Certainly they have been practising successfully in all fields of law for years, and they have been ably filling positions on the provincial superior courts and supreme courts. I should like to ask the Minister of Justice what qualifications he and the Prime Minister were looking for