

SOCIAL SECURITY

LIBERAL PARTY LEADERSHIP CAMPAIGN—CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT ON CUTTING GOVERNMENT DEFICIT—IMPACT ON SOCIAL SERVICES

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare who is responsible for such programs as medicare and old age Security. Last week, following the announcement by a Liberal leadership candidate that he would cut the deficit by some \$15 billion, the Vice-President of the Bank of Nova Scotia said that this could only be accomplished by making major cuts to health care and post-secondary education, by putting a means test on old age pensions, and by imposing user fees for medical services. Since the Minister is supporting that particular Liberal candidate, what recommendations has she made as to which of these programs she would be willing to cut?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): That is a very bizarre question, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member, who, I thought, would accompany me at my request, knows very well that I just returned from Geneva where the World Health Organization's annual meeting was held, and from Brussels where I had the pleasure of signing the reciprocity agreement on pensions for Canadians and Belgians. I think that is going to be my answer.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1450)

Miss Bégin: I think it is important to talk facts, and maybe she should check her facts, because mine are the ones I have just stated.

Miss MacDonald: Mr. Speaker, I realize the Minister was out of the country, and I realize she would really like to duck this embarrassing question. However, with a statement like that and the concern it is causing around the country, the Minister cannot get away from facing up to this question. She has to recognize that the very person responsible for starting this country on its ruinous deficits is now trying to put the blame on social programs.

MINISTER'S POSITION

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, is the Minister willing, as is the leadership candidate she is supporting, to put the elderly and low income people in the front line of attack? Is that what she is all about?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for giving me a golden opportunity to remind her and her Party that this Liberal leadership convention is about defeating the Conservatives in the next election. Every candidate for the leadership is going to be elected by some of these people, the same Canadians who have a beautiful network of

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social programs. This is Canada; social programs are part of our social fabric, and we will never go back on that.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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STATUS OF WOMEN

NATIVE WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview-Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister, who will no doubt be aware of the very strong concern Canadians have, especially women, for the repeal of the discriminatory Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act, and the reinstatement of native women and their first generation children. Would the Prime Minister not agree that equality for women is now entrenched in the Constitution of Canada through our Charter of Rights, and that accordingly the establishment of equal rights for native women must come first in the promised legislation so that native women will be able to take part in the evolution of native people's self-government?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is stating a lot of correct facts about the Charter of Rights. Equality in every area should prevail over other laws, and that is the sense of the Charter. That is why we on this side hold that the Charter will and must prevail. The legislation itself is part of a whole movement by this Government to update its legislation so it will be in conformity with the Charter. But I would suggest that if, by chance, we could not pass the legislation—and the Government plans to do it—the Charter would still prevail.

I must point out to the Hon. Member that aboriginal rights are also part of the Charter. She is not unaware that there is a difference between the AFN, the Indian federation, and the other parties to the constitutional conference held in March on the way in which women will be given equal rights under the Indian Act. It is that debate which is taking a little bit of time. We want to assert and reassert in our legislation the principle of equality contained in the Charter, but we would prefer to do it in a way acceptable to the Indian people themselves in order to avoid any suspicion of paternalism. If we can succeed in doing it in a way which will get their assent, I think it is worth waiting a little while longer.

WOMEN'S ATTENDANCE AT EDMONTON CONFERENCE

Ms. Lynn McDonald (Broadview-Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is directed to the Minister responsible for the status of women. It concerns this very debate and the ability of women to take part on an equal basis.

The Minister will be aware that a conference among native peoples is opening tomorrow in Edmonton, and that native women's organizations have been seriously disadvantaged because they do not have the funding to attend it. Many women have had to borrow money, for example, in order to go