

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister recognize that, beyond all the nice rhetoric, the only measure taken by his government was to contribute to the impoverishment of Canadian families by substantially reducing UI access and benefits, thereby forcing the unemployed and their families to rely on welfare?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to inform the House that one of the major results of the changes we made to the unemployment insurance system in the legislation last spring was to provide assistance for an additional 27,000 low income families with children. We substantially increased their UI benefits.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about children's health. My question is: Does the Prime Minister realize that his social reform, which is designed to cut into these programs—and that is the only measure announced—will in fact impoverish families already living below poverty level, in very difficult conditions, and also have harmful effects on children?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I have asked members of the House to wait until we table the paper before they begin making judgments on the various propositions.

However I can tell the hon. member very clearly that the issue of child poverty is a very central concern of the government. It will be seriously addressed in the discussion paper. We will use that occasion to engage Canadians from one end of the country to the other in a major debate on how we can better mobilize resources to put an end to child poverty by the end of this century.

● (1435)

It is a commitment this party made when it was in opposition. It is a commitment we make as a government to begin to bring Canadians forward on a serious debate about how we can deal with the problem of children and their parents.

I would ask the hon. member to use her best offices as a member of that party to provide a constructive and positive contribution to that debate.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked for an explanation of questionable practices

within the defence department. Most glaring was a \$327,000 contract in connection with the deputy minister's office.

This figure could in fact be much higher. A departmental answer to an access to information request suggests that additional costs have been camouflaged by splitting invoices between several agencies.

Does the Prime Minister agree that this is an unusual practice? Will he tell us how much money was involved in these purchases, and if those figures are not now available will he commit to making them public when he has them?

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the allegation and the question are centred around the Lagueux report, an audit done in national defence in 1992. I was briefed on it and I have to report to the House.

On the evidence that I received this morning I have to report that there is no evidence of wrongdoing whatsoever.

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands): Mr. Speaker, there are many discrepancies revealed in the Lagueux report that indicate poor management practices within the department. People inside and outside the department are aware of the allegations and are unhappy with the implications.

In the interest of morale and confidence in the system will the parliamentary secretary commit the government to commissioning an outside, unbiased, professional investigation to settle the matter once and for all?

Mr. Fred Mifflin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, if you accept my answer to the first question then obviously the answer to the second question has to be, I regret, no.

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[Translation]

CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

In the report on poverty, women's health problems are mentioned. The Minister of Health announced the establishment of a centre of excellence on several occasions: during the throne speech, in January; during the budget speech, in February; in the House, on March 8; in Montreal, before the Canadian Medical Association, on August 16; and finally last week, at the gynecologists' convention.

When will the Minister of Health stop announcing that the centres of excellence will be established shortly and act?