

Oral Questions

• (1420)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people in my office do not talk about the constitution but about how to prevent separation. It is not the same thing. And, in order to prevent separation, all we are asking the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois is to finally make a decision and ask the population a clear question: Do you want to separate from Canada? And Quebecers will say No.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister refuses to dissociate himself from Mr. Dion's comments, I must conclude that he endorses them.

I ask the following: Since he refuses to publicly dissociate himself from Stéphane Dion's comments, are we to understand that the Prime Minister's referendum strategy has gone from scaring Quebecers into saying No in 1980 to hurting them into saying No in 1995?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, what we are doing is telling Quebecers that, with a very good federal government, they will stay in Canada. That is why we tabled, for example, a budget that was very well received by Quebecers. We hope that the Quebec government will stop talking about separation and committees, deal with Quebecers' real problems such as economic problems and job creation, and bring down a budget which addresses Quebecers' real problems, as a government must do.

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CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

The official opposition questioned the heritage minister on several occasions to find out how much will actually be cut from the CBC's budget over the next three years. Only two weeks ago, the minister was still denying that any decisions had been made concerning the corporation's financing.

How can the Minister of Canadian Heritage reconcile his statement with what the Vice-President of Radio-Canada television, Michèle Fortin, said yesterday when she announced that 750 positions would have to be slashed in the CBC's French network to accommodate the cuts totalling \$350 million over three years, imposed by the heritage minister?

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I checked the information the hon. member is referring to. Radio-Canada, my source, confirmed that no cuts were announced. I assume this means no staff cuts or layoffs have been decided. It is only natural for Ms. Fortin to share her concerns with union reps when she meets with them, but no layoffs have been announced by Radio-Canada.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Richelieu, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as my philosophy professor used to say when he got a flimsy answer like this to a sensible and pertinent question: "Swine have no appreciation for pearls".

My second question—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: My hon. colleagues, we have all had good professors in our school days, but I do not think they should be quoted so literally in this place. I would ask the hon. member to please withdraw his last sentence at least.

Mr. Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, I will gladly comply with your request and withdraw my statement.

My second question is for the same minister. How can he explain the scope of the alleged cuts to the CBC's French network, when it is so successful that its viewing shares can be as much as three times larger than those of the English network? Is it the minister's new cultural policy to penalize those who succeed?

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I gather that our colleague did not like my answer. I am just stating the facts, as provided and confirmed by Radio-Canada, but he refuses to hear the truth. I too had good masters and good professors. My grandfather, who was born in Sainte-Flore, Quebec, used to say: "When you let the ewe out of the barn, it comes and relieves itself on your doorstep".

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1425)

The Speaker: Now that we have heard quotes from Shakespeare, a professor and a grandfather, I hope we can hear the hon. members speak for themselves.

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[English]

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, last night in Saskatoon the Prime Minister made several inconsistent statements concerning the national health system.

He said the government would maintain current medicare standards and yet federal funding would be tied to economic growth and would drop as a percentage of GDP.

There is no way current standards can be maintained under this plan, especially since the OECD estimates that Canada's health care costs will double over the next 20 years.

How does he explain this inconsistency and how will current standards be maintained given increased demand and reduced federal funding?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had read the whole speech, I indicated growth in health expenditures has stopped in the last two years and there is already a start in reduction.