

Oral Questions

Leeds, for the constituency of Leeds, and is a cousin of mine. Mr. Matheson's design was subsequently adopted as the Canadian flag after a very long and bitter debate in this Chamber.

Today all Canadians are proud of our great flag. Long may it wave over a strong and united Canada.

* * *

SOCIAL PROGRAM REFORM

Mrs. Bonnie Hickey (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents of St. John's East have given the discussion paper on reforming our social programs serious consideration. They have written and phoned me with their views and come into my office for meetings. Also, over 100 constituents turned out to a public meeting that I hosted on November 29.

I am pleased to say that this meeting was a success. It was good to see on a cold Newfoundland night that there was a good cross-section of people in my riding who had come out to express their opinions.

I am currently preparing a report which summarizes the points made at the meeting and will be forwarding it to the minister and the standing committee on human resources.

The government has asked Canadians for their views on social security reform. I have told my constituents that I will ensure their views on this issue are well known.

* * *

• (1415)

SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and submit my second Liberals copy Reform award.

Number two on the list is the hon. member for Hamilton—Wentworth who said: "The practice of using tax revenues to finance special interest groups with particular axes to grind has created a multimillion dollar system of bureaucratic patronage that operates with little accountability to ministers, MPs, the media, or the taxpayer".

It appears that Liberal backbenchers are finally beginning to see the light and have added the Reform blue book to their reading list.

Unlike the red book the blue book calls for the reduction and/or elimination of funding to special interest and advocacy groups. Unfortunately cabinet is not listening.

To date we have seen no action by this government to cut back interest group funding. To cabinet we say enough is enough.

Listen to what the Reform Party is saying. Listen to what the Liberal backbenchers are saying. Stop funding special interest groups and start giving taxpayers a break.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for 14 months now the Minister of Finance has been utterly unable to convince his Cabinet colleagues to take the measures necessary to bring about a substantial reduction in his deficit.

In an attempt to fulfill their commitments and reduce the deficit to 3 per cent of the GDP, Liberal members are proposing to further increase the burden of taxpayers, who are already weighed down with taxes, particularly those in the middle class.

Given that now is the time when taxpayers make decisions about the amounts they will invest in RRSPs, would the minister simply take advantage of this final question period to reassure worried taxpayers by undertaking publicly not to tax RRSPs in his next budget?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Roberval knows very well that we will have to wait for the budget. The Minister of Finance is not really in a position to make budget announcements here, in the House, even if Christmas is approaching. We will have to wait until the end of February.

That being said, I am sure the member will admit that if we wish to meet our objectives, cuts will have to be made. It would be of great help if his party would make constructive suggestions on exactly where we should cut.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this being the festive season, I will cordially remind the Minister of Finance that we have been suggesting tax expenditure cuts for more than a year now. What I cannot understand is why he does not implement our suggestions. We will make some more before the holidays, if he wants to keep an ear out.

I will even offer him a suggestion today. The national Treasury should make a priority of recovering \$6.6 billion in unpaid taxes owed to the government. We are not talking about people who have paid their taxes, but about unpaid taxes totalling \$6.6 billion. Since he should first recover this amount, could the Minister of Finance then undertake not to look at taxing group dental and medical plans, which have a particular impact on families?