

Oral Questions

• (1435)

Under the terms of the contract, this firm had to advise the minister on the gun control strategy he should adopt in dealing with his caucus.

How can the minister justify spending \$22,500 in public funds to develop a communication strategy aimed at convincing his Liberal colleagues to meet their electoral commitment?

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the contract referred to was entered into in the ordinary course of business in order to provide advice of practical assistance in discharging every day responsibilities. It is perfectly proper. It is money well spent.

I offer the events of yesterday as the most cogent proof of that investment.

[Translation]

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Acting Prime Minister.

Can the Acting Prime Minister tell us if the practice of using public funds to develop a communication strategy for the Liberal caucus is widespread among his cabinet colleagues, and if it is consistent with government ethics?

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has some facts, only some. The balance of her question is a combination of either invention or wishful thinking.

The funds were spent for the legitimate purpose of seeking the advice of others as to how best to serve the public interest. This was not advice on how to deal with caucus. This was advice on how to deal with issues that confront the Minister of Justice in relation to performing public responsibilities in the public interest. That is exactly why the money was spent.

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GUN CONTROL

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this morning the justice minister said Liberal MPs who express their opinion and opposition to gun control legislation would not be punished. That was cool comfort. Already these MPs have been turfed from their committees.

The Speaker: As I explained earlier, we have a tradition in the House of not referring to any votes taken in the House or how members have voted. I ask hon. members to please be cognizant of this in framing their questions and also in giving their answers.

Miss Grey: Could the government House leader explain to the House and to the Canadian public what has happened to the red book promise of allowing more free votes in the House of Commons?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, free votes are those designated as such by the government. We did not designate the vote on second reading of the gun control bill a free vote.

However, we are keeping our promise each day the House sits because we treat all private members' business as free votes. This is certainly a lot more than was done by the previous government. At the same time, in the way the House voted on the gun control legislation we are responding freely to the consensus of the Canadian people.

Miss Deborah Grey (Beaver River, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, MPs must be allowed to represent their constituents without threats from the party whip. MPs should be praised for that, not punished.

Could the justice minister or the government House leader explain to the House why some Liberal members have been immediately turfed from their committee duties?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not a matter involving the government as such but the internal workings of our caucus.

• (1440)

We would be happy when the time comes to go to the Canadian people as a party, as a caucus and ask for their support on the basis of the good work we have been doing for the Canadian people. This is exemplified by our support of the Minister of Justice's very positive, necessary and constructive gun control legislation.

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[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Last November, the federal government, unhappy with a CRTC ruling on direct satellite broadcasting, formed a committee made up of friends of the government so that it could bypass the CRTC ruling in order to benefit other friends of the government, including Power Broadcasting.

How can the Minister of Canadian Heritage give credence to the report by a panel of so-called experts, when they only met with the Power Broadcasting project representatives and refused