

Oral Questions

Today the Minister of Finance is refusing to disclose documents which his own deputy minister recommends be made public. Why is the minister refusing to comply with the laws of this country and why is he violating the undertaking that his own Prime Minister gave to the Canadian people?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, we are going to be making documents available, but there are some documents that are clearly advice to the minister which will not be made available. I think that is—

Some Hon. Members: Why?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): The hon. members ask why. Because there is an element of the Access to Information Act which requires that if there are documents that are advice to ministers, that should be retained as confidential advice and should not be made available according to the Access to Information Act. I said in the House that we would be making available information that the applicant was entitled to under the Access to Information Act, and that information will be made available.

Mr. Milliken: Mr. Speaker, the facts seem to be that the minister is refusing to disclose 530 pages of information that his own officials gathered in response to this request, and he says that that is all advice to the minister. It is easy to cover this up in this way. I suggest to the minister that in accordance with the Prime Minister's undertaking to the people, he has an obligation to, in the Prime Minister's words, "end this obsession with secrecy".

How can the minister justify this stonewalling in his own department? Is it because he misled Canadians during the election campaign?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is clearly no. There is a long-standing tradition that information that is advice to the minister has to be kept confidential under the Access to Information Act. If advice to ministers is not kept confidential, then that flow of advice from the officials to the minister will be broken. Clearly it is in the interest of parliamentary government not to have that flow of information broken, which is clearly advice from the deputy minister, from the department to the minister.

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, this is incredible. The budget forecast documents requested by *The Ottawa Citizen* were pulled together in five days by the Department of Finance.

Ninety-seven days later the Minister of Finance rose in this House and said, "It has taken a while to pull this information together".

I want an explanation from the minister. Is it not because release of the documents will show that indeed the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance misled Canadians in the last election?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): No, Mr. Speaker, that is not the reason. We have made it very clear that through the activities and the actions that this government has taken, department by department, we are complying with the Access to Information Act. If the hon. member checks the record of the Department of Finance, I think he will find that the record of providing that information is good. What we are doing today is consistent with what we have done over the past five years, and it is completely in accordance with the Access to Information Act.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gauthier: Mr. Speaker, I checked the statements made by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, and I would like to read one of them. During the 1988 campaign, Prime Minister Mulroney said his Government had taken care of the deficit, that all promises made by the Conservatives were and would be within Michael Wilson's financial limits and that everything had been calculated down to the last cent. If the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance were telling the truth during the election campaign, why do they now refuse to release documents that would show whether Canadians got a frank and open response to their questions from this Government?

[*English*]

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, we have provided information on a range of things over the course of our experience in government that demonstrates we are providing documentation that is, "frank and open", to use the member's words.

I have commented on a number of occasions about the particular matter that was raised during the election campaign. I commented on that during the election campaign, and after the election campaign.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is in the same area. As the House knows, the minister promised to provide this information back on October 10. We now know that yesterday the minister overruled the advice given to him by his own deputy minister, Mr. Fred Gorbet. We also know that he has