

be proceeded with on the grounds that she was questioning the implications of the oath of secrecy, when the information with regard to her questions about the oath of secrecy was not available until Tuesday of this week?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, by the calendar, today is April 26. The letter which was received from Dr. Franklin is dated April 22 and was not received until April 24. That, coupled with the reservation which she raises herself in her letter, as explained by the Prime Minister yesterday, should sufficiently answer the Hon. Member's question.

● (1125)

TIMING OF DECISION

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it might sufficiently answer a question, but it has nothing to do with my question.

I would like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister again. It has been reported, both by PMO officials and by Ministry of Energy, Mines and Resources officials, from the Ministers' offices, that the decision not to appoint Dr. Franklin was made late last week on the grounds that she had indicated that she wanted further clarification with regard to the implication of the oath of secrecy. However, she wrote to the Government on Monday of this week seeking the clarification. In her letter she wrote:

May I stress that I am not looking for private dispensation from the secrecy provisions but for a clarification of the relationship of the Board to the public.

How could the Cabinet make the decision last week, based on her questioning of the oath, when the Cabinet was not aware that she was questioning the oath until Tuesday of this week?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, it is quite simple. In the first place the Hon. Member's question infers that a decision has been made. It has not. Second, we are not going to be holding up an appointment because of the existence of the statutory requirement with respect to the oath of secrecy and the possible need for a review of that. But our original information came to the Government from someone who was personally known to Dr. Franklin, who expressed those reservations.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, may I ask the Deputy Prime Minister is it normal practice that hearsay from other people would be taken as sufficient evidence not to make an appointment which already had been indicated was about to be made? Is it the position of the Government that it should have taken the word of someone who may have known Dr. Franklin, rather than asking Dr. Franklin herself?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, the Government operated on

Oral Questions

the basis of the best information which was available at the time. That best information indicated—which was subsequently borne out by Dr. Franklin's letter—that she had serious reservations with respect to taking the oath of secrecy. That was in the letter itself. Since that time there has been communication with Dr. Franklin with respect to the administrative problem in the appointment, and Dr. Franklin has accepted our apologies for any inconvenience which may have been caused by that.

* * *

THE ADMINISTRATION

EMPLOYMENT OF MINISTERIAL AIDE

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri-Westmount): Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the Deputy Prime Minister the opportunity to distinguish himself during this Question Period.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Ask the question.

Mr. Johnston: During this debate, his seat-mate, the Minister of Finance, has admitted that he allowed someone who was on the payroll of a Toronto advertising firm to work unsupervised in his office, that he did not sign a conflict of interest statement, and shortly after his departure, within days, an agency of the Department of Finance received an advertising contract worth \$234,000. Would the Deputy Prime Minister agree that this is, at best, shabby administrative practice, and that the public expects and is entitled to higher standards from the Government?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, what I find shabby, on this side now, is hearing that kind of question from a member of the former Government whose ranks were riddled with conflict of interest throughout his term and well beyond that into the dim recesses of history. That is what I find shabby.

For the Hon. Member to suggest that the gentleman was working unsupervised is unworthy of him. Certainly he was under the very capable guidance of a Minister whose integrity, in the view of all of us, cannot be questioned.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

DOUGLAS ROBSON—LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri-Westmount): Mr. Speaker, I would like to set the record straight. I do not question the Minister's integrity—

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Johnston:—that is not how we operate.