

Adjournment Debate

was only willing to give \$15,000 to an organization which has already saved 60 children.

[English]

What the Tories are actually indicating is that they are only willing to spend a miserly \$10 for each of the children on the RCMP missing children's registry. How can we take the Solicitor General's initiative seriously? How can we explain to the nearly 1,700 children and their families out there that they are worth only \$10?

[Translation]

In summary, my question is the same as last October 3: When can the Missing Children's Network expect to receive the necessary funds to maintain an adequate level of service for the Canadian people? Why is this government so reluctant to provide the funds which the agency needs? And when will this government adopt a positive and modern attitude to the Missing Children's Network and stop looking away from the problem, as it did in the past?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Boyer (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for the strong humanitarian commitment she has shown in this area by raising this issue today and previously in this House. However, I would also reject the facile analysis that we have just heard relating to spending, and the seriousness of the problem, and her contention that this government does not care or is not aware of this problem.

Before when she raised the question with the minister in the House she had been pushing very hard on behalf of an organization, the Missing Children's Network, for an amount of \$150,000. The fact is that the government and that department is not able to provide sustaining funding for organizations. Yet the government did want to provide assistance. It did contact the network and provided \$15,000 for the conference that was held. It is currently working with the network in Montreal, and others, to develop very important pamphlets that will be of guidance to parents, teachers, community groups and others to bring to light some of the information that we have learned in this country, sometimes with difficulty

and sometimes with sadness, about the social problems that give rise to missing children. This is an effort to get this information out in pamphlet form which involves another \$15,000.

When the hon. member contends that this government is unaware of the problem she is in fact herself unaware of the fact that in 1985, within months of forming the government of this country, the seriousness of this problem became very clear to the government, as it did to all Canadians. The government at that time announced plans for a national forum on missing children, created a missing children registry within the RCMP, and initiated much of this important research into what is really the cause of missing children.

• (1730)

The fact is that in most of the cases the police are normally the lead community agency in responding to a missing child incident. It is not a matter of just spending a lot more money. It is a matter of improving links and understanding, information and communication among the police, schools, parents, courts, social agencies, and members of Parliament—all organizations involved—because there is in fact much more that can be done through effective co-operation than simply spending more money on the problem.

The creation of the RCMP missing children registry way back in 1986, which did predate the hon. member joining the House of Commons, has been the single most important contribution of the Ministry of the Solicitor General to the missing children issue. I am not going to give the statistics now because the member did so in her remarks.

There is a tremendous challenge here. It is not one that can simply be answered by putting money to it. It is one that is very serious. The research that the federal government has been carrying out has shown that the majority of the missing children incidents reported to the police involved children running from their home or from an institution. Many of the incidents of running away involve children who run more than once during the same year. After runaways, parental abductions constitute the second largest category of missing children incidents that are reported to the police. Abduc-