

S. O. 31

The minister has stalled on this issue for too long. It was this government that appealed the Thibaudeau case last year, causing another year's delay. I urge the minister to act immediately to change this unfair law.

* * *

ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently the United States Senate passed legislation allowing oil and gas development on the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd in the Alaskan wildlife refuge. This action contravenes a 1987 agreement recognizing Canadian and American joint responsibility to protect the habitat of the Porcupine caribou herd and the Gwich'in people who depend on it.

I urge the government to ensure both the continuation of the U.S. government's commitment and the right of the Gwich'in people to their traditional food source and longstanding way of life. We owe this action to our aboriginal people.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to inform the House that the appeal challenging the wearing of turbans by Sikh RCMP officers has been summarily dismissed in the unanimous decision made by the Federal Court of Appeal in Calgary.

The measure of a strong and just society is its ability to weave our differences into the fabric of our national identity. The dismissal of this challenge has once again proven that Canada is a strong and just society.

These decisions reaffirm that the wearing of articles of faith by a Sikh police officer in no way impedes their ability to perform their duties with impartiality and fairness.

Let this decision be a wake up call for the Reform Party. Its opposition to Sikhs in the RCMP is out of line with the Canadian legal tradition and demonstrates an intolerance to cultural diversity. When will the Reform Party realize the 1930s are over? It is 1995 and the time has come for it to support the religious freedom of all Canadians.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, each year over 225,000 Canadian children are abused. According to the committee on sexual offences against children and youth, 53 per cent of females and 31 per cent of males have been victims of one or more unwanted sexual acts.

Approximately four in five of those incidents happened to victims when they were children or youths, and one-third of all

assaults against children occurred within the family. In addition, at least one million children in Canada have witnessed violence by their fathers against their mothers.

• (1105)

Children who witness violence by one parent against another are often considered children at risk by child welfare authorities because of the lasting emotional and psychological consequences for the child. In many cases the children grow up to be abusive themselves, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence.

I appeal to all levels of government and to all Canadians and organizations that we must do a better job related to violence against children.

* * *

[Translation]

SHARING OF FEDERAL DEBT

Mr. Pierre Brien (Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the sovereignists have always maintained that a sovereign Quebec will negotiate sharing the federal debt with the Government of Canada on an equitable basis. A study conducted by the Institut national de la recherche scientifique and released yesterday shows that a sovereign Quebec's share of the federal debt would have to be reduced by \$24 billion on account of the fact that, over the years, Quebec has paid more than it has received from the federal government. The INRS study concludes that a sovereign Quebec should therefore be responsible for 17.4 per cent of the federal debt.

It is important to note that in the present federal system, Quebecers currently assume 23 per cent of the federal debt with the \$30 billion in taxes that they pay each year to the federal government. Hence the INRS conclusion that the total debt burden of a sovereign Quebec would amount to 103 per cent of GDP, as compared to 108 per cent for Canada at the present time.

According to the INRS study, a sovereign Quebec would therefore have a lower debt level than Canada now has.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Philip Mayfield (Cariboo—Chilcotin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the time has come to give Canadians freedom of choice in health care.

Every year Canadian taxpayers put tens of billions of dollars into health care premiums to pay for our medicare. Yet many of these same Canadians make the conscious decision to drop out of the conventional health care system, choosing alternate forms of health care.