

information and will answer according to the information I get, so be it. But this will prevent us from asking supplementaries, getting additional information. Therefore, in each instance, the Deputy Leader will have to go back to the Minister and get answers to our supplementaries, that is the additional information we are requesting.

We are in a difficult position, and so is the Deputy Leader. Unfortunately, because of the possibly protracted absence of the Government Leader in the Senate, Senator Olson, we would like to know how we are going to ask our questions?

Will the Deputy Leader take responsibility for answering questions when there are no Ministers present in the Senate? Will he accept our questions as notices, seek the required information from the Minister and advise the senator who asked the questions?

We should like to be better informed as to the extent the opposition may obtain satisfaction concerning its requests for information.

I should like to obtain the opinion of the Acting Leader as to the extent the government might commit itself to reply to the questions.

Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I suggest that we look closely at the way an ordinary senator could reply on behalf of the government to the questions of the opposition.

I am not asking this question maliciously. We just want to clear the situation and know what approach we should take concerning the Question Period.

**Hon. Royce Frith (Acting Leader of the Government):** Honourable senators, I take this opportunity to emphasize the fact that it is only on a rare occasion that the Leader of the Government in the Senate is absent from his house during the Question Period. I should like to advise the Senate of Senator Olson's health condition. He has gone through the operation which I mentioned last week. I am very happy to report that on the day following the operation, Senator Olson was up and could walk. He has spent fewer than 48 hours in intensive care at the Civic Hospital. He is now under intensive care at the National Defence Hospital. According to his physicians, he is doing fine. He is even ahead of his expected recovery. He will continue his recovery at home.

As to the other points which Senator Asselin has raised, I think it is quite normal that Senator Olson take certain questions as notices. This occurs generally when the question implies some information which is required from a department for which another member of the Cabinet is responsible and results from the fact that the question period is meant essentially as a mechanism to obtain information.

I promise to spend as much energy as Senator Olson did to seek information from his colleagues in special cases. As I have already stated, it is quite normal for Senator Olson to contact his colleagues of the Cabinet when the question deals essentially with the administration of another department.

As to the general aspect of the question, I will try to fulfill to the best of my ability the duties of the Leader of the

[Senator Asselin.]

Government in the Senate. As to the departments which are the responsibilities of Senators Argue and Austin—

**Senator Asselin:** You have no departmental responsibility.

**Senator Frith:** Yes, I agree.

**Senator Asselin:** You have no ministerial responsibility.

**Senator Frith:** I cannot answer right away on behalf of the government. Still, I point out that Senator Olson, who can answer right away as member of the Cabinet, does take a question as notice now and then because he cannot speak for another minister. I have to consult other ministers before answering many of the questions put to me here. I cannot say what is Cabinet policy because I am not a member of the Cabinet. That is my answer in the absence of Senator Olson.

I am committing myself right now to try to get the information as soon as possible, including answers to supplementary questions. With respect to certain aspects of government policy which normally are the responsibility of Senator Olson, Senator Austin or Senator Argue will try to answer along the lines of general principles. That is how we will have to behave while waiting for the return of the Leader of the Government.

**Senator Asselin:** The most logical way to solve this problem would be to recommend to the Prime Minister that our colleague be temporarily appointed Minister of State until Senator Olson gets back. That might clear up the situation and ease his conscience and his professional ethics with respect to ministerial responsibility. Senator Frith is taking chances when he claims to answer questions dealing with government policy. It is decided by the Cabinet. You might find yourself in a difficult position.

**Senator Frith:** I take this opportunity to set the record straight. I cannot answer questions on policies decided in Cabinet meetings. If it is a general statement on government policy, Senator Argue or Senator Austin can try to answer. Otherwise, the only possibility, as Senator Olson does from time to time, is to consult ministers or try to obtain information through my colleagues.

**Senator Asselin:** Good luck!

## EDUCATION

### POST-SECONDARY—STATUS OF FUNDING

**Hon. Arthur Tremblay:** Honourable senators, fortunately, my question has nothing to do with the exchange we have just heard. It aims at obtaining information about a question asked during the previous session and addressed to the Leader of the Government, Senator Olson.

In passing, I should like to take this opportunity to inquire about his health. Senator Frith has just given us very good news and I am happy to hear it. I would ask him to tell Senator Olson that I wish him a speedy recovery.

My question aims at reviving one I have already asked and which died on the order paper. It concerns the progress accomplished in the negotiations about post-secondary education financing between the Federal Government and the provinces. I was more explicit when I asked Senator Olson for this information. These negotiations have been going on for quite a