

*Oral Questions*

If the Liberals had dealt with this in the first year of their mandate we would not be in the hole we are in today. The finance minister has got to start accepting some responsibility. He blew it right from the beginning.

When can Canadians expect to get some tax relief? The minister is saying, trust me. It will be sometime in the next millennium, over the hill and beyond the horizon. When exactly are we going to get some tax relief in this country?

**Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the most important kind of relief that this country should look to is a reduction in interest rates.

The member knows that if we were to proceed to a tax decrease right now that the net result would have an immediate impact on the budget. It would not lead to lower interest rates and might well lead to higher interest rates. In fact that is what is happening. That is what all the commentary is about now in those countries in Europe that are contemplating a tax decrease.

We are dealing in a very measured and deliberate way with a huge debt and a huge deficit which this government inherited. It inherited it from a previous government, the government that most of those people, the crypto-Tories over there, probably voted for 10 years ago.

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[Translation]

## CANADIAN HERITAGE COMMITTEE

**Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. For the past two weeks, the Liberal members of the heritage committee have objected to the fact that two federal cultural agencies, namely the Canada Council and Telefilm Canada, subsidize artists or productions with a bias towards the sovereignist cause.

Since the Prime Minister skirted the issue yesterday, I am putting the question to him again today. Does he endorse the position taken by government members sitting on the heritage committee, who maintain that granting agencies should now fund artists according to their political opinions?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our policy on the subject is clear. The Canada Council is an independent agency that grants subsidies based on its own set of criteria. The fact of the matter is that the Quebec artistic community has always greatly benefited from the Canada Council, and everyone in the Quebec arts community is very pleased with the objectivity displayed by the Canada Council.

Members may not always be happy with the way a subsidy is granted or used. Freedom of expression is a privilege enjoyed by every Canadian.

It is like when the Canada Council buys paintings for the National Gallery; some like it, others do not. But they are at liberty to do so, and I think that nowhere in the world is the arts community afforded as much independence as in Canada.

**Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister not agree that there is cause for concern when the head of the government seeks not only to control the information provided by a government agency but also to provide political guidance on the content of cultural productions subsidized by the Canada Council and by Telefilm Canada?

**Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I do not see how the hon. member can say something like that, because the law has not changed. The Canada Council is the same as it has always been, and our members are doing a very professional job.

I maintain that members are free to complain when they are unhappy about something, and they have indeed aired their complaints on many issues. That is what freedom of speech is all about. Members who have objections to raise should raise them. That is what they were elected to do. On the other hand, while it has to take their objections into account, the Canada Council is free to act as it sees fit.

• (1445)

I will not ask the members not to express discontent. Government members and opposition members alike are entitled to their opinions.

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[English]

## DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

**Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, through access to information I received an audit from April 1994 that revealed the practice of hiring family members at Natural Resources Canada.

In one forestry office alone, the auditors counted 115 people in one year who got their jobs from relatives on the inside of the department. That was last year. This year a new audit says that there is still a major problem that the minister has yet to address.

Will the minister initiate a department-wide audit of contracting in her department to uncover the real extent of the family compact at NRCan, or will she at least get a family member to look into it?

**Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me first point out to the hon. member that the audit to which he refers is an audit of contracting practices that took place during fiscal year 1992-93, before this government came to power.