

[English]

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

INQUIRY WHETHER CONSENSUS SHOULD BE REACHED BEFORE PROGRAM EXPANSION

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, I would like to address my question to the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, following the questions addressed to him with respect to the advertising campaign of the government or of the Liberal party.

The minister has said in his statements in the House and in interviews that unless there is some consensus among the parties with respect to the subject of the advertising campaign, it would not be appropriate. In view of the fact that there are very substantial differences in this House with respect to the way in which constitutional reform should take place, does the minister consider that it is appropriate for the government at this time to enter into a very expensive advertising campaign? Does he not stand by his principle that there must be consensus as to what is to be achieved before there is an advertising campaign?

Hon. Jim Fleming (Minister of State, Multiculturalism): Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member's question is hypothetical because I have made it clear that at this time the cabinet has not approved a further campaign. However, I also tried to make it clear that if this House has approved in principle, then I think it is quite appropriate to go ahead and explain government policy—

Mr. Clark: Formal approval?

Mr. Fleming:—in the same way that the ads which ran in the summer on what I call phase one broadly reflected Parliament and did not go into any specific issues where there was, in my view, wide controversy.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Madam Speaker, the point is exactly that, that there has not yet been a consensus with respect to the question of constitutional reform. There has not been approval in this House to this point in time. Therefore, in view of the government memorandum, which I am sure the minister has read carefully, with respect to advice on advertising campaigns, will the minister now make a categorical statement in the House that he is not going to subscribe to the advice he has received in this memorandum with respect to additional funds, so that we will be assured that there will be no further funds made available for the Liberal party advertising campaign?

Mr. Fleming: Madam Speaker, we have over several years done advertising through an office called the Canadian Unity Information Office about Canada and the national government. The last government, of which the hon. member was a member, did that as well.

Mr. Nielsen: That is not true.

Mr. Fleming: It is part of an ongoing campaign to inform the Canadian public. I have made myself clear on several

Oral Questions

occasions today about the principles I stand by on Government of Canada advertising. I said this morning, however—and I continue to be concerned and I say it quite openly—that that may have to be reviewed if indeed the provinces take an aggressive stand without the approval of their own legislatures, such as that taken by Premier Bennett of British Columbia.

APPROVAL OF UNILINGUAL ADVERTISEMENTS

Mr. Benno Friesen (Surrey-White Rock-North Delta): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the same minister. The minister has just finished saying that it is the Canadian Unity Information Office which is the vehicle for expressing government policy, yet an official of that office has said this in relation to this campaign: "Final approval is really at the cabinet level. We did not make the decision to go with one language. We approved the ads in both languages."

Since the minister says it is the Canadian Unity Information Office that is the vehicle of government policy, how is it that it is the cabinet which gave approval for unilingual ads?

Hon. Jim Fleming (Minister of State, Multiculturalism): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is confused and he confuses me with what he quotes. When I spoke of constitutional ads, I spoke of the Canadian Unity Information Office, which comes under the minister responsible for federal-provincial relations. I do not understand the hon. member's question. I thought the hon. member would understand it is basic policy that when we go to spend taxpayers' money, the cabinet has to approve the spending of it. Therefore, we approved the spending of that \$6 million. Not all of that money has been spent. There is no further constitutional ad campaign approved at this time.

Mr. Friesen: Madam Speaker, the fact is that the cabinet has been in such a hurry to get these ads out that it violated the Official Languages Act in doing so.

An hon. Member: Question.

Mr. Friesen: I would like to ask the minister who authorized him to spend money in contravention of the act, and if this is such a non-partisan ad campaign, why was the national unity office not used?

Mr. Fleming: Madam Speaker, with all respect to the hon. member, that is a silly question. I am sure he would not, and I would not, authorize the approval of any ad campaign which made that mistake. I believe there were articles in the newspaper. That was drawn to my attention several days ago. Clearly an error was made. It is being cleared up, and replacement ads were put up some time ago. I really find it very humorous, after its experience over six months, for the opposition to laugh at a mistake being made.