

Oral Questions

My supplementary question is directed to the minister of housing. One would think that after the mauling which the Minister of Finance has taken over the sales tax fiasco, the minister responsible for housing would tread a little more carefully. He has been meeting with the provinces individually, but is he afraid to meet them collectively around the same table?

Will the minister tell the House why he is afraid to meet the provinces at a federal-provincial meeting of ministers? Will he also tell the House when he will call such a meeting?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): I do not think I have been afraid of meeting my provincial counterparts. I did it in Edmonton—

Mr. Paproski: You bombed out there.

Mr. Ouellet: —and it was a very successful and fruitful meeting. I will be quite glad to have another meeting with my counterparts at any time that suits all of them. The hon. member at one time indicated a meeting had been cancelled. I want to assure the House that I have never cancelled a meeting. In fact, the previous minister of housing for Alberta intended to host a meeting of provincial ministers of housing and invited the federal minister to it. The minister of housing for Alberta received a reply from many of his counterparts, indicating they would not be ready at the date he suggested. Since then, I understand this person is no longer the minister of housing for Alberta.

Mr. Paproski: He is running against your government.

Mr. Ouellet: Therefore, he could not pursue his efforts along this line. I want to assure the hon. member that I have had discussions with many provincial ministers responsible for housing and municipal affairs. Meetings are taking place with each province in order to sign an agreement on both the housing package and the community services package. These meetings are very successful, maybe not in the mind of the hon. member but surely in the minds of those who take part in these meetings. They are advantageous for the people who need affordable housing in Canada.

Mrs. Pigott: Mr. Speaker, the minister says there was not a cancellation of that meeting. But telexes really are not a great idea when one is trying to bring forth new proposals for housing and, under municipal grants, put a whole new direction into municipal affairs.

My question is: The minister's latest excursion under the municipal grants program has already been criticized by the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. In view of the concern expressed by those two provinces that the government's Liberal patronage machine will completely ignore their provincial jurisdiction, will the minister assure the House that there will be no consultations among federal officials and municipal authorities or, more particularly, among pork-barrelling Liberal politicians and local officials, before the grants under this program are awarded?

[Mrs. Pigott.]

Mr. Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the hon. member is so afraid of a good program that has been put forward by this government.

An hon. Member: Because of your record of patronage.

Mr. Ouellet: It seems quite clear that the hon. member recognizes the value and the merits of such programs, but she is trying to do her utmost to discredit them.

MUNICIPAL GRANTS PROGRAM—COMMUNICATION WITH QUEBEC

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, the program is being discredited by the minister's high-handed attitude in dealing with the provinces of this country. That is the problem we are facing.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. McGrath: I ask the minister if he is in a position to tell the House how he is proposing to get around the Quebec intergovernmental affairs act which prohibits municipalities in the province of Quebec from dealing directly with the Government of Canada.

Perhaps while he is on his feet the minister might explain to the House and the country why, on a question that violates the constitution of this country and infringes on provincial jurisdiction, he would take a 15-page telegram to explain this program to the province of Quebec? Why would he not meet with his counterpart in the province of Quebec, or are communications completely blocked off between Ottawa and Quebec?

• (1117)

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that there is no infringement of provincial rights. Second, the federal government does not intend to deal directly with the municipalities: the hon. member is totally wrong in assuming that. If he is afraid that the intergovernmental act that he referred to would be infringed, I say he has no reason to fear this because the federal government does not intend to deal directly with the municipalities.

In concluding my remarks I would like to say there has already been a series of meetings with provincial ministers. There will be others. The program will be put in place according to the priorities of the provinces, as they asked me to do when in Edmonton. The program that has been released is as a result of consultation among the ten ministers of housing of the provinces and myself in Edmonton a few months ago.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Speaker, the program that is now in place is in difficulty because it was anticipated that we would be in a federal election campaign. The minister anticipated this program would strengthen the government in dealing directly with the municipalities and bypassing the provinces—another method of pork-barrelling.