ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*English*]

PROSTITUTION

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Acting Prime Minister.

Over the past several weeks we have been raising a number of concerns about this government's abandonment of Canadians most in need.

Seeing the Prime Minister now, as well as wishing him a happy birthday, I would like to ask him a very serious question.

As the Prime Minister knows, there is probably no sadder situation than young people who have turned to street prostitution. I have now had a chance to review in depth the decision of the Minister of Justice to refuse to fund programs to help get street prostitutes off the street. Is the Prime Minister aware that, in rejecting these programs, the Minister of Justice stated that she was doing so because of:

> —the reality of budgetary constraints, the multitude of issues competing for government's attention—and the need of the government to spend money where it's most needed.

What can be more needy than the need of the street prostitute to get off the street? My question is to the Prime Minister.

Hon. Kim Campbell (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member refers to a very complex social problem. I have not said that I am not willing to participate in such programs. My remarks were made in the context of a response to a report by the standing committee of the House, and my concern is that the evidence shows that many street prostitutes are not getting off the street. Therefore, if we focus our program solely on those who are willing to come off the street, we will miss the opportunity to provide a very important connection between society and its caring services and those who are on the street.

However, I made it very clear in the report that I was interested in discussing the matter further with provincial governments who have the primary responsibility of delivering services in that area, and I am very open to supporting programs that can be shown to be effective.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, in fact the studies show the exact opposite. The studies show that the majority of young street prostitutes want to get off the street.

Does the Prime Minister agree with the statement made by his Minister of Justice, which reads:

> It is open to question whether such projects—

That is referring to projects to get prostitutes off the street.

> —would have much impact on prostitutes, given the reality of the minimum wage that is available after having completed most training programs.

The minister's statement can be interpreted in one of two ways: either the minister is admitting that government training programs are a complete failure and people would be better off in prostitution, or she believes that people choose to be prostitutes in order to make a lot of money.

Will the Prime Minister dissociate himself from the remarks that were not made off the cuff, were not made in passing in a random interview, but were tabled in a report in this House? Are those his views and the views of his government?

Hon. Kim Campbell (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's comments on my remarks are in a sense taken out of context of what I was doing, which was responding to the recommendations of the standing committee. I have in fact been involved in the city of Vancouver with programs that are designed to help people who want to get off the streets, not just prostitutes but other kinds of street kids.

● (1420)

Clearly it is a complex situation. The report of the standing committee seemed to be of the view—solicitation was in fact what it was reviewing; it was making recommendations on how to deal with the solicitation of responding or doing a review of the application of the government's law—that there was a simple connection between those programs and getting people off the street.

I was simply making the point that that is not clear, that it is a much more complex problem than that, and that all of those young people who are on the street need to be dealt with whether or not they show at any time a