

Oral Questions

Sometime in December, the Canadian parliament passed a bill amending the Family Allowances Act. At the time, the Minister of National Health and Welfare told us that Quebec families would, on the whole, derive greater benefits from family allowances.

I have here a press release issued by the Quebec health minister in which he states that family allowances paid by the federal government will decrease by 22.1 per cent. Here is my question: Before the bill was passed by the Canadian parliament, did the minister have talks with the health minister of Quebec, and the other provinces, naturally, and did they agree with the amendments proposed to the law? Furthermore, is it true that Quebec will receive 22.1 per cent fewer benefits from federal family allowances?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the provinces were advised of the changes in the family allowances which are of federal jurisdiction by myself as soon as the government took its decision at the end of August. I met Dr. Lazure at the federal-provincial conference held in Toronto, but on the night when I called him on the phone to advise him of the change, he told me that he envied the fact that I was able to get my government to accept the change which he was unable to do with his own government. The January cheque mothers have just received is accompanied by a particularly nasty note saying they are losing money. He forgot to say that a new cheque will be added to the monthly family allowances cheque which does, I admit, give \$12 to \$15 less for the first child, for instance. However, the new cheque will give an extra \$60 million net to Quebec mothers in 1979.

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for that information.

Could I ask her to issue a release to give more specific details to family allowances recipients since in many cases referred to me people wonder if they have to file a tax return to take advantage of the tax credit even though they do not pay any income tax. It is urgent, in my opinion, that the situation be cleared up so that there be no useless controversy and that Canadian and Quebec families are not made to believe that they will sustain such a large decrease.

Miss Bégin: That is a very good question, Mr. Speaker. I would now like to inform all hon. members in this House that an announcement is being aired over the radio across Canada as well as published in the country's weeklies and ethnic papers, and which will be presented under a different form on television next week, telling mothers: That piece of paper you received with your January cheque, read it, do not throw it away, for that thirteenth cheque is not automatically issued, you have to ask for it and of course it will be paid to most mothers. I will indeed keep on informing hon. members on the program. We also have information kits available to hon. members.

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

● (1430)

[English]

I would also like to add something which I think is pretty important. All local service groups—women resource centres, citizens' groups, poverty groups, native mothers' groups, women's groups—are welcome to apply to the ministry of health and welfare for small amounts of money in the form of contacts for services in order to help canvass neighbourhoods and to help women fill out these forms, if they have never before filled them out.

[Translation]

Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse): I would like to ask a supplementary question. Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister if it would be possible to add the following to the information already supplied: that it is essential, according to the law, to file an income tax return in order to be eligible for the tax credit, because people are all mixed up about that. At the same time, they could be told about the date when they can expect their tax credit. Would it be in the middle of the year, at the end of the year, at the beginning of the year or immediately after they have made their request? Of course, if that amount is to be added to their family allowances, they must receive their cheque; but are they going to receive it?

Miss Bégin: Next week, every Canadian mother will receive an income tax return form. All of them, even those who do not usually fill an income tax return, will have to do the following: supply all information relating to their identification and the amount they request, write N/A on every other blank, sign the form and send it to Revenue Canada. Beginning the third week of March, cheques will be sent to families on a first come first served basis at the time of income tax returns.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES

POLICY RESPECTING EX GRATIA PAYMENTS

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the President of the Treasury Board regarding the government's policy on ex gratia payments which, as he well knows, implies no liability or receipt of value for services but these payments are made on the basis of benevolence or some other consideration.

In view of some very large payments set out in this year's public accounts, has there been a change in policy to justify, for example, a payment of \$40,000 to McGregor Travel in Montreal, which was the catalyst in the Estey inquiry into Air Canada, or some \$2,300,000 for land expropriation at Mirabel in apparent circumvention of the expropriations act? Could the minister give us the reason, if there is a difference in policy?