

Oral Questions

the current Solicitor General, in view of what that Solicitor General said in the House yesterday about matters before the Human Rights Commission for investigation?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I do not see any validity in the allegations contained in that preamble. I do not share the view, but if he really believes that he is correct he should be speaking to the Hon. Member for York South-Weston, and perhaps to the Hon. Member for Hamilton East, rather than directing criticisms here.

COMMENTS BY MINISTERS

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Mr. Speaker, I am talking about the conduct of Ministers for which the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister are responsible. I ask him why the Government will not continue to apply the fundamental principle that Ministers should not comment on matters before courts or tribunals, including matters before the Canadian Human Rights tribunal, for investigation.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I allowed the first question because I understood his dilemma, but my dilemma with the second question, I think the Hon. Member will know, is that since he asked me to rule on the matter as a point of order, and I have reserved on that, I think I should really make a decision and come back on that question prior to these questions being put, with respect.

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FISHERIES

ISSUANCE OF CLAM FISHING LICENCES

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Revenue. It relates to the Cape Breton clam scam. Would the Minister confirm that he lobbied the Minister of Fisheries to obtain valuable clam fishing test licences for Mother Snow's Fine Foods, while at the same time the Department of National Revenue was attempting to collect thousands of dollars in unsatisfied judgments against a principal of the company?

Hon. Thomas Siddon (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I think the question relates to the procedure in which experimental licence applications have been invited from a number of different contenders who seek to develop an important economic opportunity off the coast of Nova Scotia. That procedure has been carried out by Atlantic regional officials in accordance with specific criteria, established to be fair and equitable to all applicants. Any representations made to myself as Minister of Fisheries were made by Members of Parliament from Nova Scotia in accordance with their duties as Members representing their respective constituencies.

ROLE OF MINISTER OF NATIONAL REVENUE

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of National Revenue confirm for the House that he admitted in a public forum that he lobbied on behalf of Mother Snow's Fine Foods and its principals when it—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Would the Hon. Member please resume his seat? The Hon. Member knows that questions can only be placed to Ministers with regard to their administrative responsibilities.

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SOCIAL SECURITY

SPOUSE'S ALLOWANCE—NUMBER OF APPLICANTS

Hon. Douglas C. Frith (Sudbury): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of National Health and Welfare my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. It concerns some disturbing statistics issued to me by the Department of National Health and Welfare respecting the eligibility of widows and widowers between the ages of 60 and 64. Apparently only 30 per cent of 40 per cent of eligible widows and widowers have bothered to apply for the extended spousal allowance. Does the Minister blame his dismal record on the poor advertising campaign to inform the public, or did the Government seriously overestimate the number of persons eligible for that program?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member was correct in that that is a question which is more appropriately put to my colleague, the Minister of National Health and Welfare. He knows that we have gone to a good of trouble, both in direct advertising as well as in advertising through Government cheques, to try to advise all Canadians who could be eligible for this. We believe that the statistics originally set out are accurate statistics. We are still trying to advise people who could be eligible that the program is there. I thank the Hon. Member for his question, because it helps bring that to the attention of Canadians.

● (1140)

REQUEST FOR REMOVAL OF MARITAL STATUS CRITERION

Hon. Douglas C. Frith (Sudbury): Will the Minister, with the resulting \$200 million in savings, now extend that program as we advocated during the time of debate on the Bill to all people between the ages of 60 and 64 regardless of marital status?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this Government is always looking at various options to consider regarding eligibility of people for programs. I will take his comments as a further representation.