

Oral Questions

constituency office on the second floor of a building which offers no access to the disabled or elderly. This regrettable situation arises because rents in many large urban areas in Canada are three times or more as expensive as those in rural or smaller communities. In effect, budgets for Members of Parliament do not reflect this reality whatsoever in order to deal effectively with this problem.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Management and Members' Services, I am aware this matter has been addressed. However, the speed at which progress has been made in this area would make a snail's pace appear supersonic. Meanwhile, in many communities across Canada the disabled and the elderly are denied proper access to the office of their Member of Parliament, access which should be a right for those people.

I know I speak for all Members when I say how sincere we are in our efforts to create easy access to our offices for all Canadians.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

AWARDING OF CONTRACT—ROLE OF DOUGLAS ROBSON

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance and concerns the Wilson family compact which resulted in a \$234,000 cozy deal between the Minister, his brother-in-law, and his riding association president. It is unusual that the words uttered in the past by Tories such as "fraud", "deceit", and "sham", have now been replaced by "integrity", "objectivity", and sometimes even "sanctity", to describe the present situation.

Would the Minister tell the House if Mr. Robson, during his employment with the Minister, was privy to any information which could directly or indirectly assist him in obtaining government contracts? Furthermore, could he tell us whether Mr. Robson and Lawson Murray Ltd, have any other contracts, directly or indirectly, with the Government of Canada at the present time?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday to the House that Mr. Robson was dealing in my office on a totally administrative basis. He was my executive assistant in 1979, as I said, and he understood the way I wanted the office set up. He was dealing strictly on an administrative basis; nothing to do with policy, nothing to do with the awarding of any contracts.

As far as a response to the second question is concerned, I do not know. I have nothing to do with contracts in the Government.

[Translation]

LETTING OF LUCRATIVE CONTRACTS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker. The current situation is intolerable and shameful, and the Minister's defence is even worse.

Is the Minister actually informing this House and all Canadians that any company may send emissaries or representatives to work in a Minister's office and then, quite coincidentally, leave that office with lucrative government contracts, and if so, could the Minister inform the House whether this kind of attitude is reasonable, considering the Canadian taxpayer who must pay the cost of these contracts?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I think I made it very clear in my first answer why Mr. Robson was there. He was there because he was my former executive assistant in 1979. He knew the way I worked; he knew the way I wanted to have the office established. I was under a great deal of time pressures at that time if the Hon. Member thinks back, and I had to go immediately to Washington for a series of international meetings. That was the purpose of his work.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST GUIDELINES

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I want to direct a question to the Prime Minister. I have in my hand a copy of his conflict of interest guidelines for Ministers of the Crown. Section III relates to avoidance of preferential treatment. It says that "Ministers shall not accord preferential treatment in relation to any official matter to relatives or friends, or to organizations in which their relatives or friends have an interest. Ministers must also take care to avoid placing or appearing to place themselves under an obligation to any person or organization which might profit from special consideration or favour on their part". Does the Prime Minister not feel that this guideline has been broken in this particular instance?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Inasmuch as the contract to which my right hon. friend refers is a contract that was awarded pursuant to objective criteria by another Minister completely, I am satisfied that there were no violations by the Minister, who is a man of great integrity. Having said that, I will certainly acknowledge that not only must Cabinet Ministers avoid conflicts of interest, they must also avoid even the appearance of conflicts of interest, which is why Canadians were so horrified when the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition assumed the position of Prime Minister of Canada and for a number of weeks maintained important corporate directorships. There is the difference between what the Minister of Finance did and what was done in other circumstances. We will defend this Party's integrity any time and in any circumstances.

• (1420)

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!