

Oral Questions

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, Reform has advocated an advanced education voucher system to shift federal transfers for post-secondary education into the hands of those most concerned about educational requirements, the students themselves. This would make educational institutions more responsive to students' needs.

• (1435)

Will the government consider providing Canadians with the choices that such a voucher system would provide?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, when we amended the student loans program last spring we brought into the formula a series of grants available for women to go to graduate programs, a remission of loans program, and the ability of students who have income needs to receive certain assistance.

What we have proposed in the green paper, I want to reiterate, are simply proposals. They are not government policy. We suggest that there could be a combination of loans and grants, in effect a voucher system for individual students that would enable them to tailor their financial requirements according to their needs without the same kinds of complication and means test that now apply to student loans. There could be much easier funding not only for students who are presently in educational institutions but for the many Canadians who are in the workplace now and want to go back to school.

If that is in some way complementary to what the Reform Party is proposing, we would certainly be glad to look at it. However I would suggest the hon. member should introduce those ideas into the committee report because the government will take the report very seriously.

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[Translation]

COLLÈGE MILITAIRE ROYAL DE SAINT-JEAN

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs unfortunately dismissed the constructive proposal made by the mayor of Saint-Jean.

According to this proposal, which is more than just a moratorium, the Collège de Saint-Jean would be allowed a period of transition, during which it would gradually be turned into a civilian institution. The mayor's proposal has the advantage of reducing the negative impact that an immediate shutdown of military training activities at the college would otherwise have, if the federal government were to proceed as planned.

How can the minister be so reluctant to be more open-minded and flexible about considering the proposal made by the mayor of Saint-Jean, a proposal that would meet the objectives of all parties while providing for a gradual transition?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the mayor's proposal contains some very useful clauses which I looked at a few hours ago, and I will certainly give them some thought.

However, it is wrong to say that the proposal meets the conditions set by the Government of Quebec and the Government of Canada. From the financial point of view, in particular, the mayor's proposal would mean that the federal government would have to spend an additional \$23 million over three years to maintain the moratorium, while at the present time we have a compromise solution reached by the Government of Quebec and the federal government, a solution that ensures the survival of the college, maintains a military presence at the college and provides for the transition from a military college to a co-ed civilian university over the next few years.

The present solution, an agreement signed by the Government of Quebec and the federal government, is a far more successful response to the conditions set by the Government of Quebec and by the federal government. Those who want to—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Charlesbourg.

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to see that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs is thinking about the proposal, which means we can expect the situation to evolve.

As my supplementary, I would like to ask the minister how he and the Minister of National Defence can repeatedly maintain their excuse that closing the Collège militaire de Saint-Jean will mean a savings of \$23 million, when it is public knowledge that the real savings will not be more than \$10 million, and that only a few years from now, because of the reduction in the number of cadets?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an exaggeration, to put it mildly. For months we have known that by closing the Collège de Saint-Jean, we would achieve very substantial savings, because due to military downsizing, we will no longer need as many cadets as we did before.

We now have an agreement that provides for maintaining the Collège de Saint-Jean with a military and a civilian component. We have a compromise solution. We reached a compromise and have an agreement that was signed by the Government of Quebec, under which the objectives of both parties can be met.