

Oral Questions

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I stood up all during Question Period in order to ask a question of the Minister of National Health and Welfare, and now she has disappeared.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Simcoe North.

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PORTS CANADA CORPORATION

APPOINTMENT OF WINNIPEG ACCOUNTANT AS AUDITOR

Mr. Doug Lewis (Simcoe North): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Transport. The Minister will know that the Auditor General has been the auditor of the Ports Canada Corporation since 1936. Will the Minister tell the House why a chartered accountant from Winnipeg has been recommended for the 1983 audit rather than continuing with the Auditor General?

Mr. McKenzie: Because he is a friend of Lloyd.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the Hon. Member. The Ports Canada Corporation has only been in operation for the past year or so. The transfer to a new form of Crown corporation is one that I would have assumed the Hon. Member would have understood and recognized. Therefore, we had to make a choice regarding new auditors. I also would have expected the Hon. Member, who is a member of the Conservative Party, to be more sympathetic to the basic principle of making sure that all professional work is diversified to firms right across Canada.

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

Mr. Doug Lewis (Simcoe North): Mr. Speaker, the Minister will know that an auditor must not only be independent, he must be seen to be independent. The head office of the Ports Canada Corporation is in Ottawa. I would again ask the Minister whether this is the way the Government intends to treat audit appointments? Does it intend to take audit appointments for the taxpayers' Crown corporations away from the Auditor General? Is that the new policy of the Government?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that nothing could be more independent from Ottawa than somebody in Winnipeg. The fact is that the firm in question certainly enjoyed the confidence of the previous Conservative Government. When it came to power, it assigned much of the auditing to that firm. If they enjoyed the confidence of the Conservative Party then, they should enjoy the same confidence now.

CANADA HEALTH ACT

PENALTY PROVISIONS—MINISTER'S POSITION

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. After meetings with many of the provincial health ministers, the Minister has indicated that she is open to making some changes to the Canada Health Act, changes which they have called on her to make. Will she be similarly open-minded about some of the concerns that have been expressed by myself and by groups concerned about medicare, that the penalties provided for in the Canada Health Act may not be effective as they stand? Will she be open to suggestions that the penalties be made tougher, in combination with the provision of positive incentives for provinces that want to act quickly to eliminate extra billing and user fees? Will she show the same kind of open-mindedness on that issue?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I apologize. There was an urgent phone call from my Deputy Minister. I was absent from the Chamber for half a minute. I failed to see the logic in the Hon. Member's speech yesterday. I listened to his speech. He wants me to reward those provinces which rapidly get rid of breaches of the Act. What do I do with regard to those provinces which did not breach the Act? Has he thought of that? Second, I would be interested to see what amendments the Hon. Member would propose when we reach the appropriate stage of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Chair has some concern about questions relating to a Bill before the House or answers relating to it. If the Hon. Member has a supplementary, I caution him in that regard.

EXTRA BILLING BY DOCTORS

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, my question has to do with the time frame for getting rid of extra billing. Will the Minister consider shortening the three-year period so that we can get rid of extra billing—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I believe the Hon. Member should put this question in connection with the debate when the legislation is before the House.

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FISHERIES

APPOINTMENT OF ASSOCIATE DEPUTY MINISTER—EFFECT ON WEST COAST INDUSTRY

Hon. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Fisheries. It is supplementary to the question asked by the Hon. Member for Nanaimo-Alberni. The Minister responded that he could not see the relevance of it. In view of the fact that we have had the Pearse Report on the West Coast, the Cruikshank Report, and