

Oral Questions

a strategy before the end of the year. We will need the help of every Canadian.

I believe that Canadians understand that to be able to provide services to children we have to create the resources. I ask my friend to help me get the resources, starting with a good economy in this country.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, in times of economic distress, children must be the last to suffer.

A year ago the Prime Minister said at the UN World Summit for Children: "Canada still has serious problems that affect children in many ways".

This morning on Parliament Hill, some 500 child symposium delegates told members of Parliament: "Child poverty in Canada is a national scandal".

Since a national child care program is crucial to any child poverty strategy, when will this government make good on this age old promise?

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of the hon. member I will repeat what I said to his predecessor. This government has a long-standing commitment to dealing with problems concerning children, not just daycare but also the whole problem of child sexual abuse, family violence and school drop-outs. I think this is a global problem.

So far, in terms of available resources, the government has gone as far as it could in allocating those resources, and it is committed to doing more in the future. But this cannot happen, Mr. Speaker — As I told the groups this morning, I refuse to make any promises because it all depends on our capacity to generate the necessary resources. And as I said before—since I was asked not to talk about interest rates—when interest rates are at 25 per cent, there are no available resources to take care of Canada's children.

[English]

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, the government knew its resources when it promised day care six years ago and several times since, but it did not fulfil the promise.

Another very sad fact is that aboriginal children in Canada live under horrific health and social standards, with an acutely high number of infant deaths and suicides.

What is the minister prepared to do today to eliminate these alarming problems? Will he allow Canada's children to become the lost generation?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity last summer to visit many reserves in Canada, particularly in the member's home province.

I totally agree with him that what is a problem for white people becomes a more difficult problem for aboriginal people in all parts of the country. That is why the health services branch of the department is working closely with the chiefs of the First Nations.

I asked the ministers of health of all provinces to be with me at a meeting in Winnipeg last September with leaders of the aboriginal communities to find a way to answer the health problems of children in particular. We put particular emphasis on children. Once again, it has to be done within the capacity we have. I am looking forward to continuing to work with Indian leaders to give all the relief we can to aboriginal children in Canada.

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SOUTH AFRICA

Mr. Girve Fretz (Erie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State for External Affairs.

South Africa has made significant strides in dismantling apartheid and perhaps now is the time to reconsider having normal trading relations with that country. Therefore, my question is this: when will the government lift trade sanctions?

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to report that, as a result of efforts by this government through working with the Commonwealth, the sanctions policy with regard to South Africa has proven to be an effective one.

As a result of the progress made in South Africa, the Commonwealth heads of government two weeks ago agreed to an immediate removal of people to people sanctions and indeed, Canada has already done that.