

Oral Questions

Welfare. In view of the galloping health care costs and the failure of the government to date to contain those costs, I wish to ask the minister what percentage of those health care costs are attributed to alcohol and alcohol produced disease, keeping in mind it is reported that 40 per cent of health care costs in France are due to alcohol and alcohol related disease. Further, what percentage of health care costs are attributed to respiratory diseases, including cancer of the lung, occurring in smokers and occupational hazards?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Unless the minister has that information immediately, perhaps the question ought to be placed on the order paper.

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I will give a short answer to the hon. member. He may want to pursue this matter with an order paper question. First, I disagree with his statement that we have had galloping health costs this year. Thanks to the efforts of the provincial governments and the federal government, we have been able to reduce by some \$42 million the estimates of expenditures on the health side during the course of this year. I think that indicates remarkable progress as far as health care costs are concerned. With regard to the cost of alcohol abuse there is no specific answer to that question. However, there are estimates. Previous estimates were over \$1 billion. More recent estimates indicate in Canada alone it might be as high as \$2 billion. It is estimated that in the United States the cost is \$25 billion.

Mr. Rynard: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Grenville-Carleton.

Mr. Rynard: Ten o'clock.

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GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION**APPOINTMENT OF COMPTROLLER GENERAL—REASON FOR FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATION OF AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the President of the Treasury Board. It arises out of his statement yesterday about the importance of a financial officer. He said:

—it could possibly challenge the whole structure of parliamentary responsibility, ministerial responsibility to parliament and the rights of members of this House.

I presume the financial officer would basically be dealing with senior levels of the public service on accounting and financial matters of the ministry. I presume his annual report would be tabled in parliament in the normal course. I further presume that the work of the Public Accounts committee might very well be lessened as a result of the work of a financial officer catching mistakes at their source. Will the minister explain how in his judgment and in the judgment of the government the parliamentary responsibility or the rights

[Mr. Rynard.]

of members of this House could in any way be curtailed by adopting the report of the Auditor General?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I say with great respect to the hon. member that he has partially answered his own question. He made a great number of presumptions which are not clearly indicated in anything that I have seen. There could be patterns where this could be done. I said yesterday that I find a certain appeal and attraction for the proposition, so much so that I want to be quite sure about these other matters, not just that matter of accountability, although related to it is the question of decentralization and perhaps over-centralization, as a reaction to some of our concerns. All these questions have to be answered. In the meantime, there are many things we are going to do. We are not going to wait. There are many presumptions, as the hon. member said, and these have to be examined.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, surely the overall presumption with respect to parliament is that parliament, through its Public Accounts committee, has approved of this kind of recommendation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Indeed, it is rather presumptuous of the ministry to sidestep the assertions of the parliament of Canada through its Public Accounts committee. Given that set of facts, is there any earthly reason why the government of Canada ought not to reconsider what is obviously an attempt to avoid what is necessary in this government, namely the control of the financial and administrative affairs of the people of Canada?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, there is no argument about the need. There will always be the need, even after we make these changes, for further examination and careful attention to the improvement of control over financial management. However, there are serious questions about the final method or structure and organization in which it is done. I really think that down the path, although he may not admit it, the hon. member will quietly agree that this is a serious matter which has to be resolved.

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LABOUR CONDITIONS**PORT OF SAINT JOHN MAINTENANCE WORKERS—ACTION TO SETTLE DISPUTE**

Mr. Eymard Corbin (Madawaska-Victoria): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Acting Prime Minister, the Minister of Labour. In view of a very critical situation in the port of Saint John, New Brunswick involving a dispute between maintenance workers under the National Harbours Board over an Anti-Inflation Board ruling, can the minister inform the House what action he is taking to bring about a rapid solution in order to allow the normal movement of millions of dollars