

Statistics Canada

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, in the interest of freedom of information I suggest that it be tabled.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to table the report.

● (1550)

Mr. Evans: Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board indicated that they decided that a Canadian could not objectively look at the methodological questions dealing with Statistics Canada. Perhaps I am mistaken, but is it not true that the contracting and staffing regulations of the Government of Canada as promulgated by the Treasury Board indicate that non-Canadian citizens can be retained by the Government of Canada only when it can be clearly shown that there is no Canadian capable of doing the particular job? Could the President of the Treasury Board indicate whether such a search was conducted to determine whether or not a qualified Canadian was available to do the job and, if such a search was conducted—as is supposedly required by the Government of Canada in such cases—is the minister saying that he could not find a qualified Canadian in the area of statistical methodology to carry on this study?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the hon. member has overlooked the main thrust of what I was saying. It is not in any way a reflection on the capabilities of those who are educated in the statistical sciences in Canada. It is very, very difficult, if not impossible, to find such a statistician who does not have ongoing activity with Statistics Canada at the present time. These people are using the data and talking to Statistics Canada personnel, if not daily, at least on a weekly basis. Consequently, if we do retain such a person, he or she may in our mind not be purely objective. He will certainly be capable, but there could always be the suggestion that he did not have that degree of objectivity that one would like as would somebody who does not have an ongoing connection with Statistics Canada.

We consulted management consultant firms and people in government as to whether it was wise for us to go outside Canada for a suitable person. To eliminate any question concerning objectivity, it was unanimously agreed by the people whom we consulted that we should secure the services of one or more experts outside Canada who are world renowned as statisticians and let them pass on their views on methodology within Statistics Canada, and that is what we are proposing to do.

Mr. Evans: Since the minister is undertaking a procedure which is in violation of his own regulations, does he intend to expand upon this particular principle in other studies which will be done by the government and allow other government departments and agencies also to expand upon this principle of hiring whomever they consider to be the most qualified person, regardless of the fact that there may be a Canadian who is equally as qualified but who, in the minister's judgment or whomever, may not be as objective as one might like in conducting the particular study? I am quite concerned because it is not only a question of objectivity. Would the minister

indicate whether objectivity or the ability to conduct an objective study is no longer to be the criterion for selecting contractors for the federal government?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I realize that the hon. member is desperately trying to make a point, but once again he has overlooked what I think is the very significant point in what we have done. We have deliberately gone to persons who are recognized in the world as being experts on this question of statistical data and the operation of institutions such as Statistics Canada. We have asked them to pass judgment on our Statistics Canada and, in so doing, have taken the most objective approach conceivable to ensure, if they do return a report that Statistics Canada is undoubtedly credible or, on the other hand, that there are problems, that we have a truly arm's length, objective study and review of the organization. I would think that most members of the House would welcome such a review.

What the hon. member seems to be concerned with are the regulations of the Treasury Board. In our opinion, that regulation was not applicable to a special situation such as Statistics Canada where one finds, as I have mentioned before, that most of the people we would normally turn to in Canada have an ongoing relation with Statistics Canada. I would not challenge the objectivity of the report, but it might be challenged by somebody down the road as not being as objective as one would like.

Mr. Murphy: Mr. Speaker, my question to the President of the Treasury Board deals with the morale of the employees. It seems to me that the people within Statistics Canada have already suffered from the statements made by the minister, the opposition and other members in this House. I am concerned that the minister has not dealt with the concerns of the employees. I think that throughout the government service there is low morale at this time because of the reports of privatization and the proposed cutback of 60,000 employees. What is the cost of this study, not only in terms of dollars, but in terms of morale?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, we will be indicating the dollar cost of the Price Waterhouse study, and the international authority, which will probably be revealed later. With regard to the cost to morale, I do not think there will be any cost, other than a general building up of morale with respect to the activities of Statistics Canada.

Mr. Speaker: I will conclude the questioning with the hon. member for Broadview-Greenwood (Mr. Rae) and the hon. member for Pontiac-Gatineau-Labelle (Mr. Lefebvre).

Mr. Rae: Mr. Speaker, the President of the Treasury Board has rejected one part of my argument. We could have different points of view with regard to the need to establish a separate inquiry commission concerning the technical activities of Statistics Canada. However, I do not believe that we dealt directly with what I was attempting to get at, and that is the potential conflict between Price Waterhouse and the commissioner, Mr. Newcombe. As the minister knows, the allegations that have