

Oral Questions

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I think at the first indication of the disaster the Prime Minister offered the resources of the federal Government to assist in any way, shape or form. There is a formula under a disaster fund emergency arrangements Act which clearly provides funding from the federal Government.

In addition, in consultation and co-operation with the Alberta Department of Economic Development, we are assessing the magnitude of the damage with the business community and determining what type of assistance would be available. That has not been completed, but the Government stands prepared to work out in a co-operative manner such assistance that might be helpful in terms of re-establishing those businesses.

MECHANISM FOR DISTRIBUTION OF ASSISTANCE

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, we wait with interest to hear what the value of the assistance will be because I think the people of Edmonton want to know what is available to them. Is the Government prepared to re-evaluate the mechanism for providing disaster relief for areas like Montreal, Edmonton, Hornpayne or wherever to ensure that there is a permanent fund put in place and money is immediately available under established rules so that people will not have any further anxiety about what is facing them?

• (1500)

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could answer this question as the Minister responsible for emergency preparedness. There is an agreement between the federal Government and all of the provinces which guarantees to any province affected by a disaster like this that, after the province contributes more than \$1 per capita in disaster relief, the federal Government will contribute as well. As soon as more than \$1 per capita is spent, between \$1 and \$3 per capita, the federal Government contributes some 50 per cent, between \$3 and \$5 the federal Government contributes 75 per cent, and if it goes over \$5 the federal Government contributes some 90 per cent. That formula is there for everyone.

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[Translation]

THE CONSTITUTION

MEECH LAKE ACCORD—OPPORTUNITY TO PROPOSE
AMENDMENT—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice.

According to many constitutional experts, including the National Association of Women and the Law and LEAF, the

Meech Lake Accord contains a serious flaw that could be fatal to equal rights for women and minorities in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I wish the Minister of Justice would let us know whether today, on behalf of Canada's women and minorities, he would be willing to move and defend an amendment that would clarify an ambiguous text that puts the equality of women and minorities in this country in jeopardy.

[English]

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question of the Hon. Member which allows me the opportunity to deny categorically the implication of the question. Our legal advice is just to the contrary. The rights of women in this country are not in any way diminished by the provisions of the Meech Lake Accord. Indeed, there is unanimity with the respect to the desires of all Canadians to make sure the rights of women in Canada are fully protected. This Government has been giving leadership in that area.

I say to the Hon. Member that while the committee is going on, as we are now sitting, there is an opportunity for Members of Parliament and Canadians generally to participate in a very important process, to understand fully the implications of this particular Accord. I conclude by saying to the Hon. Member that her assessment with respect to the rights of women is not correct.

[Translation]

TRIBUNALS' POWERS

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, is the Minister saying he does not want to take this step and that it is the Government's policy to be ambiguous?

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Minister of Justice could inform the House whether it is government policy to let the courts determine and decide whether women and minorities in Canada are entitled to equal rights in this country. Is it the Government or the courts that are going to decide?

[English]

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the Constitution of our country does provide for the equality of women. The Meech Lake Accord does nothing at all to diminish the rights of women in Canada. I ask the Hon. Member if she is indicating the position of her Party with respect to this matter that this Accord should be rejected?

Is it not an important principle that Quebec should be brought into the Constitution,—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Hnatyshyn:—that we should in fact be urging acceptance of this Accord? I ask the Hon. Member to consider her position.