

*Oral Questions***COMMUNITY VIOLENCE**

Mr. Harbance Singh Dhaliwal (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring to the attention of the House an issue which has brought tremendous sorrow and shock to members of my constituency.

Last Saturday a deplorable tragedy occurred in Vancouver south. Mr. Glen Olsen, an innocent bystander, was shot and killed while walking his dog down a street in my riding.

It is with profound sympathy that I pass my condolences on to Mr. Olsen's family and friends. I want them to know that the horror of this event has not gone unnoticed.

I have spoken to the Vancouver police department and I have full confidence that it is doing everything possible to bring those responsible to justice.

As the federal representative for my community I would like it to know that I will do everything in my power to ensure that these types of incidents do not occur in our communities. I will continue to fight for stricter gun control and stronger crime prevention measures so that tragedies like this do not occur in the future.

For the sake of the victims I implore all members of this House to support initiatives which will make our streets and our communities safer places.

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TOBACCO TAX

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, during the debate on the lowering of the cigarette tax this party presented several very good reasons why it should not be done.

It would increase smoking among youth according to Statistics Canada and would also increase smoking among the general population and add to our health costs.

Today we see that total Canadian production of cigarettes reached 5.8 billion in March, the highest in eight years. Clearly the policy of this government to reduce cigarette taxes is going to add to our health care costs, add to the illness of Canadians.

I call on the Minister of Health to finally stand up for the health of Canadians, to fight on behalf of Canadians and to fight this policy which has only led to more smoking among Canadians and greater health risks.

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• (1415)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. John Duncan (North Island—Powell River): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has decided to build its own \$11.9 million office complex in Sault Ste. Marie. This steel,

brick and glass building will include 120,000 square feet on two storeys to house the Canada Employment Centre, the Income Securities Office, Revenue Canada, Health Canada, Public Works and Government Services, and the RCMP.

Local property managers are outraged by this needless political project. A recent survey indicates there is over a 20 per cent vacancy rate in major downtown buildings. There is existing vacant office space, and a new federal building will create more vacancies.

Does the government not have better ways to put people back to work than pumping money into unneeded facilities in competition with the private sector?

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

HIGH-SPEED TRAIN

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Speaking yesterday to the greater Montreal Chamber of Commerce, the Chairman of VIA Rail unveiled his agency's proposal for a high-speed train in the Quebec City—Windsor corridor. VIA Rail is proposing that the federal government support the project financially using part of the grant it awards each year to the agency. This would allow the government to build the HST without it affecting Ottawa's budget.

Can the Prime Minister tell us if the government is interested in VIA Rail's proposal which has the advantage of requiring no additional outlay on the part of the federal government?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we have indeed indicated that we are interested in this venture. We have said that if this project can be carried out without the government having to incur significant costs, then we would be happy to proceed with it. However, if one proposal seems more acceptable at this time, I am certain the government will review it carefully. There could be a problem though in that it will be hard for a high-speed train linking Montreal and Toronto to be forced to stop for inspection at the border, once Quebec becomes independent, as the Leader of the Opposition hopes will happen.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I asked a serious question to someone who, I thought, took things seriously. Instead, he responded in a joking fashion.

The HST project has been under consideration for many years. Governments have been studying it for at least three years. Why is the Prime Minister so reluctant to announce his support for the HST, given that this project will generate