

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has referred to the recent judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada in which the court considered the equality provisions in section 15 of the charter as they relate to sexual orientation.

For the first time the court pointed out that sexual orientation is an analogous ground under the charter for the purposes of that section. We are considering the judgment. More than one judgment was issued by the court in its analysis and the judges expressed a variety of views.

Quite apart from the judgment, the government has long recognized the importance of amending the human rights act to provide that sexual orientation cannot be a basis on which discrimination occurs. We have long since made the commitment to do just that.

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the Minister of Justice that the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms has prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation since 1978 and that he should use it as an example.

Are we to understand that, despite the very clear decision by the Supreme Court, the government will not change its policy with respect to homosexuals, lesbians and same sex spouses, a policy which, by the fact of doing nothing, denies the rights accorded by the country's justice system to all these Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fairness the member will know that the judgment of the court was released a week ago yesterday. As I mentioned, there are judgments both ways expressing a variety of views with respect to these matters and what flows from them.

The government should do what it is doing. It has reaffirmed its commitment to amend the human rights act. It is also going to look at the implications of the judgment. It is going to consult with caucus and determine the position that we will take on the wide variety of issues that arise on the subject of sexual orientation.

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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in dealing with the administration of the justice ministry, the

minister insisted yesterday that "when the government goes to the legal profession to hire agents to help us with legal cases, the fundamental criteria is competence and merit".

That being the case, can the justice minister explain to Canadians the appointments recently made in the revenue minister's riding in Victoria. How does the appointment of three firms with little or no experience in drug prosecution and the termination of a firm with 20-years' experience fit his stated criteria of competence and merit?

• (1130)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in British Columbia, as in the case of all other provinces where legal agents were appointed, suggested names for appointment were sent to the regional offices of the Department of Justice where they were vetted. We asked the regional justice offices whether they were satisfied the persons under consideration were competent for the work that was intended.

In the case of the agents under discussion, as in the case of all others who were appointed, the regional offices expressed their view that the individuals were competent for the work that was intended to be given to those lawyers.

If the hon. member will look at the record of agents appointed across the country he will find that in many cases agents appointed during the last regime are still doing work. Their appointments have been continued by the government because we thought they were appropriate to carry on the work in those cases.

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in news reports from Victoria an experienced undercover officer commenting on the justice department's termination of a firm with 20 years of drug prosecution experience has said:

It is a complete and utter farce. We are losing very experienced and very knowledgeable prosecutors who are used to dealing at all levels of drug enforcement. This is a definite blow to drug enforcement.

Public safety should never be compromised by political patronage. It begs the question: was the justice minister made aware of the very close connections between the revenue minister's political interests and the appointed firms?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that public safety should not be compromised on any basis. I insist that in this case it was not.

The agents who were appointed are competent for the task for which they have been retained. As to the comments of the police officers, I know only what I have read in the press and what has been quoted by the hon. member.