

Oral Questions

signed by the Quebec government, in order to put an end to the present uncertainty in the region.

[English]

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's Auditor General's report pointed out serious flaws within Correctional Service Canada.

One hundred and sixty violent offenders have slipped through the cracks and ended up on the street; those behind bars are costing Canadian taxpayers up to \$80,000 per year each. Canadians are not getting good value for their tax dollars in a system that has serious and occasionally fatal flaws.

I ask the parliamentary secretary when Canadians can expect a corrections system that works for them instead of for the criminals.

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Secretary of State (Parliamentary Affairs) and Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I answered yesterday, we welcome the recommendations of the Auditor General. We have already started to implement some of them.

Even though we admit that some persons have escaped from prison, we would like it if nobody escaped. However from April 1994 until today we have had only 76 escapees. Over the same period last year we had 147 escapees. I know that is 76 too many. We would like that figure to be zero. We are working toward that and I hope the member will co-operate with us.

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. According to the Auditor General, the appointment process for the National Parole Board seems to put Canadians at even greater risk than corrections. Many full time appointees are ill prepared to do the job, much less the part time appointees.

Will the parliamentary secretary promise to put an end to political patronage on the National Parole Board and introduce a system based solely on professional skills and merit?

• (1440)

Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Secretary of State (Parliamentary Affairs) and Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we promised in the red book we have acted. The case is clear. Concerning the appointment of the chairman, the Solicitor General has gazetted the position. There was a special experienced panel that reviewed the candidate and the Solicitor General made the final review which resulted in a good appointment.

As a matter of fact, the Auditor General states in his report that it is a good system. We intend to continue with this new system which was implemented according to our red book promise.

[Translation]

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

The Auditor General finds it regrettable that the government is about to conduct a social program reform without first gathering all the information required to make informed choices. While the results of social programs cannot be prejudged, he said, available data is insufficient to use as a basis for a proper evaluation.

How can the Minister of Human Resources Development claim that Canadians can participate in a real debate on social program reform, while at the same time providing them with only partial, incomplete and insufficient information?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member would look carefully at what the Auditor General said was a requirement for additional information, things on impact of seasonal work, premium reduction, the impact of various forms of cross subsidization and look at the paper that we tabled on November 14, she would find that all the information requested by the Auditor General, is contained in that report.

[Translation]

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the minister is prepared to conduct his social program reform on the basis of incomplete information, does he recognize that his sole objective, rather than to improve social programs, is in fact to make cuts in assistance programs for the disadvantaged?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have dealt with this question many times in the past.

If one looks clearly at the objectives set forward in the green book, in the various supplementary papers that we put forward, we are challenging members of Parliament, as we are challenging Canadians, to find a better way of delivering social programs, particularly to improve employment opportunities.

The whole purpose of revising and modernizing the unemployment insurance program and the Canada assistance program is to give unemployed Canadians, those on social benefits, a much better set of tools to help them get back into the workplace. That is the primary basis of reform.

The best way of dealing with a fiscal crisis is to have more people back at work.