

Oral Questions

The justice department considers that the cost may be as much as \$85 million and others have said considerably more over five years. Could the Minister of Justice tell the House whether this money would not be better spent in cancer research or, better yet, not spent at all in so far as this is money we have to borrow from future generations for registration and there is no proof that it will do one iota of good?

• (1455)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the first place may I say that the estimates as to costs which the Department of Justice has arrived at will be put in detail before the parliamentary committee that will consider the legislation. It will examine our assumptions. It will see our calculations. We will establish that they are real and that they are dependable.

Second, may I say that the registration system, together with the other elements of this package in the bill, are going to save lives in the country. May I close by saying that I am not the only one who believes in that.

May I point out that a survey done by the hon. member in his own riding established that 69 per cent of the respondents agreed with registration. I would like the hon. member to tell the House whether he is going to vote with his constituents on this issue.

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity to advise members opposite that I was elected by 100 per cent of the people who voted for me for three very distinct reasons. The first was to get our nation—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Usually the answers are to my right and the questions are on the other side. Would the hon. member please put his question.

Mr. McClelland: Mr. Speaker, I will vote in absolute fidelity to the best wishes of my constituents.

I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Justice. It is a most serious question because we are facing a most serious debt crisis in the country.

Will the minister, before universal registration of long guns is implemented, bring before the House the quantitative information that will attest to the veracity of his decision to register all long guns before it is implemented?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already made it clear that we will put the details of our calculations before the committee.

In so far as the wisdom of the registration system is concerned, first we rely upon the advice of the experts, the police

chiefs, across the country who have been asking for this for years.

We say as well that if the approach advocated by the hon. member was to have been taken by the person who first proposed a traffic light at an intersection it would never have been installed.

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JUSTICE

Mrs. Jane Stewart (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, several women in my riding are extremely concerned about the ability of defence lawyers to subpoena the confidential records of sexual assault crisis centres for use in court. They are afraid that the protection gained by the rape shield legislation is being eroded as lawyers use a back door to gain access to their confidential information.

What actions will the Minister of Justice consider taking to ensure that the personal records of assault victims remain confidential?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am well aware of and share the concerns identified by the hon. member.

The House should know that at my direction as Attorney General the federal government intervened in a case recently argued before the Supreme Court of Canada in which the circumstances under which such evidence can be compelled and the circumstances under which it can be introduced at trial were canvassed and argued.

In that case the federal government argued that the Supreme Court of Canada should adopt and strengthen guidelines stipulated by the Court of Appeal of British Columbia to protect sexual assault centres from harassment. The court reserved its judgment and we will await the disposition.

• (1500)

Let me make it clear to the House that if necessary the federal government is prepared to introduce legislation under the Criminal Code to ensure that we strike the right balance between full answer and defence on the one hand and the freedom of sexual assault centres to operate without harassment.

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PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Speaker: Colleagues, I would like to draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Mr. Trevor Pinnock, Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the National Arts Centre Orchestra who will soon be representing Canada in a major European tour.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.