

Oral Questions

Should I quote another proverb to keep the hon. members quiet?

Some hon. members: Yes, let us hear about the grandfather.

Mr. Dupuy: My grandfather, who was born in Sainte-Flore—

Some hon. members: Ha! Ha!

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[English]

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

I see the budget and all the changes that flow from it as a necessary but risky exercise. We inherited a government weakened by debt and we have to further downsize it in order to get rid of that debt.

Could the minister assure us that the downsized government and its programs will contain the seeds, the foundations for strong federal government in the future?

• (1445)

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I would like to congratulate the member for the way in which he has articulated his question. The budget sought to deal with those weaknesses in what is otherwise a very strong economy.

As a result, we increased substantially the fairness of the tax system. We are restructuring government to make it smaller and smarter. We are putting the deficit on a permanent downward track. We have reaffirmed our inflation targets. We have given the government credibility. For the first time a Canadian government has hit its targets and we have put the debt to GDP ratio on a permanent downward target.

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CANADA POST

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday my question regarding the Pérez affair was brushed off because it was deemed to be a matter of the previous administration.

We must remember that this involves two individuals who are currently members of the other place as well as the president and chairman of Canada Post so the issue is very current.

The government promised openness and honesty. I cannot for the life of me figure out why the Prime Minister would not ask the ethics commissioner to clear the air. Why will he not?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that it is not within the jurisdiction of the ethics counsellor. We had asked a committee of the House to look into the question of lobbying and so on. It made its report today with amendments. It will be given to another committee of the House to look at the code of conduct for members of Parliament and senators.

This has to be decided by the members themselves, not by the government, because this affects the conduct of the members of the Senate and the members of the House of Commons. It is not for the government to dictate to members of Parliament what to do. Members of Parliament are mature and competent enough to give themselves guidelines. The member will be invited to participate if he has views to share.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this is now the third time that we have asked for a response or a study or an investigation by the ethics counsellor. The answer we have received each time is: "No, no, no".

If the Prime Minister will only authorize the ethics counsellor to investigate when it is safe, when and who is going to investigate controversial issues like this one for which Canadians demand an answer?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said at the beginning, it is in relation to a situation that occurred when we were not in government. I also said that the question of the conduct of members of Parliament is a matter that is vested with the House of Commons. We will be asking a committee of the House to report on that and the hon. member can deal with this problem.

The government of today does not have to respond to what happened in previous administrations.

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[Translation]

IRVING WHALE

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment. The minister told us yesterday, with regard to the hull of the *Irving Whale*, and I quote: "—we did have an electronic inspection done last June". Our information, however, is that the inspection was a sonar side scan. This inspection permitted only a partial check of the hull using an inaccurate procedure. A real electronic inspection would have revealed the solidity of the welding and the state of structural cracks in the barge.

Is the minister going to be satisfied with a partial study, which does not permit any conclusions to be drawn on the real solidity of the hull and is she prepared to assume responsibility for any spill that may occur during refloating?