

Oral Questions

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, because from the very start I realized that one could get into a great deal of trouble by becoming actively involved in this discussion and—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lewis: And—

Mr. Simmons: More, more.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Minister.

Mr. Lewis: From the very start the consultations which have taken place between the officials at the provincial level and the federal level have been nothing more than normal discussions.

An Hon. Member: How do you know?

Mr. Lewis: Because I instructed my officials to do nothing abnormal, just conduct normal consultations.

* * *

THE BUDGET

INCREASE IN TAXES—EFFECT OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS ON HEALTH OF CANADIANS

Mr. Arnold Malone (Crowfoot): Mr. Speaker, my question is related to the Budget and directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. He will know that the tax on a carton of cigarettes increased by \$4 in the Budget. Would the Minister indicate the implications for the health of Canadians and for Canadian health care systems as the result of that measure in the Budget?

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to because it is a very important step which has been taken by the Minister of Finance. Tobacco remains the single greatest cause of preventable disease in Canada, costing the lives of between 30,000 and 35,000 Canadians a year. Indeed, the World Health Organization estimated yesterday that one individual dies every 13 seconds as a result of tobacco use.

Members opposite may not find this important, but I think Canadians do. Studies have shown that the use of tobacco, particularly among young Canadians, is extremely price sensitive. The action taken by the Minister of Finance should help to save lives in Canada, something which is important to us, even if it isn't to Members opposite.

• (1450)

[Translation]

ATTITUDE OF MINISTER OF JUSTICE TOWARD HOUSE

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint—Michel): Mr. Speaker, this morning in *La Presse*, Frédéric Wagnière referred to the Government's increasingly astounding negligence. I would like to put a question to the Minister of Justice. We now know that on April 26 at 5.30 p.m., Mr. Small called the office of the Minister of Finance about a Budget leak. We also know that the Minister of Justice, Leader of the Government in the House, tried unsuccessfully to extend the business of the House by moving a motion to that effect around 5.50 p.m. that afternoon, without any explanation. Why didn't the Minister speak frankly to the House? Why didn't he tell the House then and there that he had reason to believe there had been a Budget leak? From the very beginning, we have been hearing the Minister answer as though he wanted to hide something. Why didn't he say what was on his mind at 5.50 p.m. on April 26?

[English]

Hon. Doug Lewis (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I reject out of hand the comment that the Minister wants to hide anything. I have made it clear to his House Leader. I believe I discussed it with the House Leader for the New Democratic Party. When I came into the House at about 5.30 or 5.40 on that particular day, Wednesday, April 26, I had an indication from the Minister of Finance that there might have been a Budget leak.

I made an effort to keep the House open in order that we would have a vehicle through which to tell the House of Commons and the public what had happened. Unfortunately, I did not get the approval of the House at that time and, later on, both Parties refused to let us come here and tell it.

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—St—Michel): Mr. Speaker, it is now clear that the Minister of Justice took a sleazy action at that time to protect himself.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the Hon. Member could find another way to put his position.

Mr. Ouellet: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will indeed rephrase my remark and say—