

Adjournment Debate

This glaring contradiction brings me to the question I am raising in the House today to get more details through his parliamentary secretary. But I also want to invoke the reasons given by the minister to justify opening these negotiations to recognize the right of natives to self-government. The minister was doing it in the name of better economic management.

If it is in the natives' interest to administer their own affairs, why would the same principle not also apply to the people of Quebec who happen to be one of the founding nations and who, like the other founding people, namely the aboriginal people, aspire to manage their own affairs? It is in the name of this very principle of better economic management and not to wage a flag war against the rest of Canada or to break up a country but to build one, like any free nation in the world has done. I think that since the Second World War, 65 new nations have emerged with all attendant rights.

Our guiding principle is this: let us collect our own taxes. Let us manage our own affairs and then buy the services we need jointly with the sovereign countries around us. That is how we want to act with natives. In fact, the minister was talking about opening the Constitution in the same sense that we also want to open it, in the sense of managing our own affairs.

It is strange to see the Prime Minister saying two different things, talking from both sides of his mouth about a founding people, namely the aboriginal people, and about the other founding people, namely the people of Quebec. It is in that sense that I would like the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister to answer pursuant to the Standing Orders for two minutes to elaborate on the government's precise position.

[English]

Ms. Jean Augustine (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the member's question of January 21, 1994, when the member for Richelieu asked the Prime Minister a question regarding native self-government and the Constitution.

Let me begin by saying that the Prime Minister has stated unequivocally in this House and elsewhere that the priority of the government is job creation and not the Constitution.

The Liberal position on the nature of self-government was made clear in the red book. We said that the inherent right of self-government is an existing aboriginal and treaty right. To that extent the federal government is involved in a series of meetings with national and regional aboriginal leaders, provincial and territorial governments and other parties.

• (1830)

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples interim report said it was possible to implement native self-government without changing the Constitution. That is what we are working on at this point in the discussion. I hope this satisfies the

member's questions which seem to have gone beyond his question of January 21.

TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to refer to a question I asked the Minister of Health on February 1, 1994 as to whether she was prepared to stand up for the health of Canadians on the question of the government's proposed policy of lowering taxes on cigarettes.

The real question today is who sets tax policy and who defends health care policy in this country?

First of all on the question of who sets tax policy, Canadians are wondering whether it is the law breakers or the cigarette companies.

I must say the government certainly has some connections with cigarette companies such as that with Imasco, for example, which is the parent company of Imperial Tobacco. The Minister of Finance was formerly a member of the board. In 1992 Imasco donated \$47,477.30 to the Liberal Party of Canada. Canadians are wondering whether the cigarette manufacturers are setting tax policy.

Is it the provinces and territories? It would seem it is not the provinces and territories in conjunction with the federal government because the provinces and territorial health ministers are meeting tomorrow. The government has said it will state its intention on this matter tomorrow before that meeting is completed.

The Minister of Health in her response to my question said she was concerned about health. She did not answer as to whether as Minister of Health she would stand up for the health of Canadians and advocate that cigarette taxes not be lowered.

Rather, she said that she was very concerned about the high level of tobacco use among young people. I suggest to the Minister of Health that she might have cited the Statistics Canada study which indicates there was a direct decrease in consumption of tobacco products by teens as the price went up. However the minister refused to say where she stood on this issue.

I would say also it is clear that the direct health cost results of lowering the tax will place a further burden on the provinces. Today there is a news release from the British Columbia health minister which states tobacco related illness is estimated to cost British Columbia nearly \$1 billion annually.

I would also ask as I did on February 1 whether this government is prepared to compensate provinces and territories for increased health costs as a result of decreased cost of tobacco products.

It is clear that the use of tobacco is a very high contributor both to the health costs of Canadians and alas to the death of Canadians with some 37,000 Canadians a year dying as a result