

Oral Questions

Miss Bégin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add to the obviously incomplete answer that I gave earlier. The first request from the government of British Columbia came to me, as Minister of National Health and Welfare of this country. It was for \$16 million. The British Columbia government, which split on that issue, finally decided to have a program costing only \$4 million. It is still split on this issue.

I have said there is no way in which a particular province is going to use one particular disease or special circumstance, such as having more drug addicts in the province, to ask for more money, because each province has particular circumstances of one sort or another which are covered under the very generous block funding agreement on the health side.

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[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**RESPONSIBILITY OF PROVINCES FOR FEDERAL FUNDS USED FOR TEACHING OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa-Vanier): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Secretary of State and it deals with federal-provincial agreements on financing to support the teaching of the country's official languages.

Since this question has been raised on numerous occasions by myself and other hon. members, I would like to know if the provinces will be made accountable for the federal money used to teach the official languages. As these agreements will be terminated in March, 1979, can the Secretary of State tell us when the negotiations on that matter will begin and if he intends to demand that the provinces be accountable for all federal funds spent for teaching our official languages?

Hon. John Roberts (Secretary of State): Mr. Speaker, the negotiations to renew these agreements with the provinces will start early next week.

[English]

Obviously the House would not expect me to lay out in detail what it is we would be suggesting. I want to assure hon. members that the government does not intend to diminish its efforts in this area. We are concerned about having greater accountability, greater reporting, and success in meeting the objectives of the agreement. We will be proposing a rather strong shift away from the present emphasis on formula payments, to the non-formula side. I think that is about all I can say as to the position we will be taking at the conference.

[Mr. Fraser.]

NARCOTICS**BRITISH COLUMBIA—FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO REDUCE HEROIN ABUSE**

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I will direct my question to the Deputy Prime Minister, since it deals with the obligation of the government to keep its word.

Was a commitment made by a former senior member of this government to the province of British Columbia with regard to the heroin addiction program? Is it the intention of the government to keep the word of that former senior minister? If the Deputy Prime Minister does not know, will he give us an undertaking to find out all the details? Also, will he tell us whether it is a matter of policy of this government to keep the word given by senior ministers to provinces such as British Columbia on questions of this kind?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and President of Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, I think the Leader of the Opposition realizes that the Minister of National Health and Welfare is the minister speaking on behalf of the government with respect to such a program.

If, indeed, a commitment had been given by any member of the government, carrying the authority of the government, it would be known and supported by the Minister of National Health and Welfare. I can understand that the former minister of justice, as a minister from the province of British Columbia, might have exhibited, as I do on many occasions with respect to my province, a sympathetic and forthcoming attitude to support particular projects. However, it does not constitute, and ought not to be taken as, a commitment on the part of any minister when such a sympathetic attitude is put forward. Policy with regard to departmental responsibilities is obviously expressed by the minister who has the statutory responsibility for these programs. In this case, it is the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Mr. Clark: Just to be clear on this, Mr. Speaker, is the Deputy Prime Minister saying that when the former minister of justice made that commitment on behalf of the Government of Canada, he was not speaking on behalf of the Government of Canada?

Mr. MacEachen: The Leader of the Opposition asked whether there was a commitment. Now he has stated there was a commitment. He ought not to ask questions on matters about which he has already informed himself.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!