

Oral Questions

I know of some countries in Europe that have universal medicare which applies to all their citizens and they spend 7 per cent to 8 per cent of GNP. If we could be as good as them everybody would be saving money.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I notice the Prime Minister is more interested in monetary matters than in the level of health care to be offered to Canadians.

Does the Prime Minister realize that the situation is already very disturbing for health care recipients—in Quebec, for instance, and I am sure it must be about the same anywhere else in Canada, there is a five-month wait for heart surgery and three months for radiation therapy—and that by using his proposed transfer payments to the provinces to improve spending cuts, he will further extend delays that are already unacceptable?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Canada's health care services are administered by the provincial governments, and we contribute to the financing of these programs. The provincial government's own administration may decide what its priorities in this area will be, and that is each government's responsibility. Federal transfer payments are for us a way to ensure that health care services are available and universal across Canada. However, each provincial administration is responsible for its own budget priorities. The Constitution, in fact, gives the provinces jurisdiction over this area.

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FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, since this is the first time I speak in this House, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment.

My question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Mr. Speaker, regardless of the successive federal governments, fisheries management has been short-term, short-sighted and chaotic—so much so that the Auditor General told us yesterday that Ottawa gave grants to fishermen who had died or did not qualify. Not only is the department unable to manage marine resources but it also seems to be unable to manage financial resources.

My question therefore is this: What specific short-term measures does the minister intend to take to put the management of his department's programs back in order, as the Auditor General asks, since, let me add, his 6,000 officials no longer have any cod to manage?

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and I congratulate him on his new responsibilities.

Let me first of all make clear that the member asks what action this government will take to put order in POWA programs. The Auditor General's report is an assessment of the previous administration's program, and the Auditor General himself has noted that most of the concerns that have been raised have been dealt with.

Furthermore, the notion that funds were paid to people who were deceased in my reading of the Auditor General's report is nowhere to be found, although I understand an official said at some point perhaps that was possible.

Let me advise the member that notices have been sent to 1,300 individuals asking for complete and full repayment. That process is under way. This government, when it delivers its program post May 15, will do so in a professional, competent and first class manner that I know the member himself will be happy to applaud.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Bernier (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, my second question is when? When can fishermen in Quebec and Canada, who are now living in total uncertainty, have an idea of what the minister will do after May 15, when the Fisheries Adjustment and Recovery Program ends? Will we have the traditional improvisation from the Department of Fisheries, that is, a presentation on May 14? Let me repeat: When will the minister lift the veil of uncertainty? When?

● (1425)

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member opposite that we will not have an improvised approach. We will have an approach that is very much the result of wide and complete consultation with all provincial governments affected, including the province of Quebec.

I had a meeting with fisheries ministers from all the Atlantic region in Quebec City a few weeks ago. My colleague, the minister responsible for employment programming in Canada, human resources, met last week with representatives of all harvesters in Canada, including the province of Quebec.

The purpose of these meetings is consultation: to listen, to reflect upon the advice that is being given, and to ensure that when a program is delivered in this country it is the result of broad based public consultation at the community level.

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THE CONSTITUTION

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister has repeatedly said that he does not want to reopen constitutional issues at this time and that the priority of his government is jobs and economic growth. Yet yesterday he and other Liberal members were repeatedly drawn into