

Oral Questions

The Deputy Prime Minister is here as the primary custodian of those conflict of interest guidelines, in the Prime Minister's absence. Does he believe, upon reflection, that it is appropriate for any Minister of the Crown, in any portfolio, to accept a cash award from any lobby group, a lobby group being something which exists solely to try to influence government policy?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is asking a question about a private organization, a legal organization, which has a membership of tens of thousands of citizens of Canada, which operates quite independently from the Government of Canada, and which wanted to honour its founder. It believes that this year I have made the greatest contribution to the economic and political development of Canada by promoting the cause of free trade.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Crosbie: They, therefore, have decided to give the second Colin Brown Award to me, the Minister for International Trade.

If I decide, after listening to Members of the House, that it is proper to accept it—and I see no reason so far why I should refuse it—I will use the money involved in the award for a good cause. It will not be used for me personally but for the cause for which it was awarded, and probably other charitable causes as well. There is nothing in any conflict of interest regulations and nothing in any legislation—

Ms. Copps: Yes there is.

Mr. Crosbie:—that rules against accepting such an award. If I was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize—

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Crosbie:—and I well may be one day, should I refuse that?

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, there is no danger of the Hon. Minister being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST GUIDELINES

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, this is a serious question which goes right to the heart of the intent of the conflict of interest guidelines which were established to avoid real conflicts or the appearance of conflicts. A Minister of the Crown is saying that he has no trouble receiving a \$10,000 cash award, whether it is used by him personally or not, from a lobby group. Whether a lobby group is right wing, left wing, or centrist, it is a lobby group, the stated intention of which is to influence government policy to reflect the views which that particular group holds.

I am not interested in the view of the Minister whose hand is itchy for the cheque. I ask the Deputy Prime Minister, who is

the custodian in the House today of the conflict of interest guidelines, whether he realizes the danger inherent in the precedent being established by the Minister for International Trade.

Will he and the Prime Minister review this award and the Minister's intention of accepting it, with a view to putting a stop to this kind of activity before it causes problems and a crisis of confidence in this nation in the whole notion of conflict of interest and Ministers acting independent of the views of any lobby group?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, this is just a continuation of a campaign of calumny which was started yesterday. That is quite obvious.

With respect to this matter, the Canadian Labour Congress is an organized lobby group, as are many unions. Do we argue that they should not provide funds to the people they think represent them or any of their views, or have done something good in politics? I wonder how often the Leader of the New Democratic Party has received funding from those kinds of sources.

Mr. Broadbent: Aren't you in the Cabinet? Aren't you a Minister of the Crown?

Mr. Crosbie: The Citizens Coalition, just the same as the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Manufacturers Association, is quite in order to operate in this country and to make awards to those to whom it wishes.

If my friend, the Deputy Prime Minister, or the Prime Minister, indicates to me that there is any impropriety in accepting such an award, I would be happy to give it up. I never asked for it in the first place. It came out of the blue and it can go into the blue as far as I am concerned.

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DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES

STORAGE OF PCBs—NATIONAL STANDARDS QUERY

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I want to pursue the PCB issue with the Minister of the Environment. Yesterday in the House of Commons he said:

We are ensuring that those sites meet the most rigorous national standards for storage.

The Minister has had three opportunities earlier today to respond to my Leader regarding these national standards. Since the Conservative caucus members on the committee voted against including the term "national standards" in the legislation, would the Minister now have the courage to admit that there are no national standards to enforce?