

Oral Questions

Will the Minister of Finance commit to the House that he will introduce legislation to assure Canadians and the IMF that the debt will finally be controlled?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the IMF in its report was quite complimentary of the actions the government has taken. The report of the Auditor General of Canada was equally complimentary of the actions we have taken, both in terms of deficit reduction and in terms of the publication of information.

I have made it very clear that the process that was employed by the previous government, which was to simply set a series of long term targets, most of which occurred after an election and were never attained, was not a process we were going to follow, that in fact the series of rolling two-year targets was far more beneficial. As a result of that the government has consistently hit every single target it has set.

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the IMF wants to know when the debt is going to be under control. The Auditor General of Canada wants to know when it is going to be under control. Canadians want to know when it is going to be under control.

I ask the Minister of Finance if he knows, beyond his two-year rolling targets, when the deficit will be eliminated.

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, control is a condition of credibility. The government has re-established the credibility of government in terms of its projections and what it does. Control arises when a government very clearly not only hits its targets but in fact brings forth balanced legislation, a balanced program to do what it set out to do.

• (1445)

Our goal is deficit reduction but let us never forget that deficit reduction is an ingredient of this government's number one goal which is to make sure that more and more Canadians are working. That is what we are going to do instead of engaging in the slash and burn destructive policies of the Reform.

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[Translation]

FEDERAL DEBT

Mr. Richard Bélisle (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The auditor general just tabled his second quarterly report. With the federal debt approaching \$600 billion, he feels that Parliament and the Canadian public need more information, particularly regarding the size of the debt and the choices taxpayers will have to make.

Will the Prime Minister admit that, by waiting for the referendum to be held before giving the bad news about cuts to social programs, he is unduly delaying a public debate on the choices to be made, as requested by the auditor general?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the auditor general fully agrees with us that, before this debate can take place—and we are all in favour of this debate—there should at least be statistical data and figures available. He made this quite clear. Last year's figures are not ready yet. As soon as they are and as soon as we get an invitation from the committee, we will gladly go before the committee.

Having said that, I would like to mention what the auditor general asked us to do. He asked us to produce an annual financial statement, and we did. He asked us to provide the public with more information on our tax expenditures, and we did. He asked us to produce an annual economic update; we did so for our first two budgets and will do so again this time around.

Mr. Richard Bélisle (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

The auditor general also contends that our choices are becoming increasingly difficult.

My question is for the Minister of Finance. Will the Minister of Finance admit that this statement by the auditor general explains his government's strategy, which consists in hiding all the bad news until after the Quebec referendum?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Hide, Mr. Speaker? Tell us what a sovereign Quebec's debt level will be. Tell us how much higher interest rates will be in a sovereign Quebec. Tell us how much higher taxes will be in a sovereign Quebec? Let us lay all the cards on the table. Tell us the truth. He should tell us the truth, Mr. Speaker, about the negative impact of independence in Quebec.

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[English]

CFB SHEARWATER

Mr. Ron MacDonald (Dartmouth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence.

In the budget of two years ago, measures were announced regarding the downsizing of Canadian Forces Base Shearwater which resulted in the loss of about 700 jobs. Through perseverance and hard work that community has adjusted. However, new and unnamed DND sources are now being quoted in the media as saying that the Department of National Defence intends to completely close that base down this fall which would result in the loss of an additional 1,400 jobs.