

Oral Questions

First of all, any new construction that RMC was authorized by the previous government and amounts to normal replacement. That construction was scheduled to start in 1995. There will be no new construction required as a result of the consolidation process of the two colleges announced in the budget.

• (1425)

Second, when the hon. member talks about the Auditor General's report, and I have not had a chance to read it, he is really mixing apples and oranges. Whatever the Auditor General had to say in that area does not bear direct relationship to what is at hand with the very serious matter of St. Jean.

If the member really wanted to give hope to the people of St. Jean, the professors and other employees who work at this very noble institution, he would encourage the Government of Quebec to accept the proposal negotiated by my colleague, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. That would bring them hope because the college would stay open as a civilian institution.

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AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government spends more money on social programs than anything else. The Minister of Human Resources Development is running around the country discussing social reform. Yet the Auditor General in his report today says that a central concern in our study is that Parliament lacks important information on the performance and effects of existing social programs. Canadians do not even have the numbers, the actual costs and values received, not for existing social programs nor proposed reform.

Will the Prime Minister implement the Auditor General's recommendations and give Parliament and Canadians the financial information necessary to make meaningful choices on social policy reform?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, over the past several weeks the Department of Human Resources Development has tabled a number of very extensive supplementary papers that detail in a very wide range the impacts of a variety of options and choices.

I would be very glad to submit to the hon. member copies of those papers so that he would be fully informed, although I can assure the House that every single member of Parliament has received on his or her desk copies of those supplementary papers that fully comply with the kind of requirements the Auditor General put forward.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Including technical reports as well. The weakness of the minister's answer reveals the fundamental weakness in the government's approach to social programs. That is an unwillingness and inability to assess fully the real costs, the long term costs on what is proposed. Weak on numbers. Sauce in the heart but soft in the head.

Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that this is the fundamental weakness of the red ink book? It is the fundamental weakness of the minister's green paper. It is the fundamental weakness of the government. Will he commit to start doing something about that weakness?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that the Auditor General prepares his analyses and assessments months and many times a year before the actual developments and events take place.

I certainly agree that the Auditor General has clearly demonstrated in his report the fundamental need for social reform. He has pointed out how many of the programs have not worked well, how disincentives have crept into programs, how there is a dependency growing up. The Auditor General has underlined as clearly as anybody in this country has the need for social reform. The problem is that members of the Reform Party are opposing social reform because they do not want to see those changes take place.

I would seriously suggest that if the hon. member was really paying attention to the Auditor General's report he should be applauding this government for undertaking social reform.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): The Reform Party opposes tinkering with social reform, not real reform.

The Auditor General says in black and white what Reformers have maintained for years, that increased costs in social services since 1975 have made them, and I use his words, "financially unsustainable from tax revenues".

This is a broader question than just the minister's department. Will the Prime Minister come clean with the Canadian people and tell them that with current deficit and debt levels federal social programs are financially unsustainable and that is the reason for having real reform rather than tinkering with the social programs?

• (1430)

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one can only draw this conclusion from the hon. member's questions and general responses.

The Reform Party is not interested in meaningful reform. It is interested in mean-minded reform. It simply wants to cut, cut, cut. It does not want to change the programs to get people back