

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Constitution of Canada has vested the Prime Minister of Canada with the responsibility to fill the jobs in the Senate. Of course when I name someone, I make a decision. It is always a patronage appointment.

When my predecessor, Mr. Trudeau, selected the father of the leader of the Reform Party, it was a political patronage appointment when he became a senator. If the leader of the Reform Party does not want me to keep that privilege, he had a great occasion, when we voted in the referendum on the Charlotte-town accord, to make the Senate elected. This gentleman voted against having an elected Senate.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister appears to believe that continued use of partisan patronage at the highest levels of government is somehow compatible with his pledge to integrity in government. He appears to believe that patronage and integrity can live in the same government and dine at the same table.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Who, if anyone, has he consulted on the ethics of this matter? Has he consulted the ethics counsellor? Did he call former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney on the phone? Who, if anyone, has advised him that patronage and integrity can coexist within a government?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a little problem. If someone is a Liberal or supports the Liberal Party he is disqualified. Then 63 per cent of the Canadian people are disqualified because they are Liberal.

It is not very good for my humility, but if I were to discard all the people who have expressed confidence in this Prime Minister, then 75 per cent of the Canadian people would be disqualified.

I ask everybody to look at the quality of the people I have appointed. That is the criteria. Each one is a great citizen of Canada, making a contribution in his or her own province. Jean-Robert Gauthier has been one of the greatest defenders of the French fact in Canada. The Governor General will prove to be a great choice that the Queen has accepted.

The Speaker: This has to be Wednesday.

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[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Defence.

The Auditor General is critical of the Department of National Defence because of its ad hoc approach to closing military bases, and I quote: "The budgetary process provides no opportu-

nity to prepare the labour force or the communities for change, and to plan a strategy for government assistance". That was a reference to the 1994 Budget, not the budget of the previous government.

• (1435)

Will the Minister for National Defence admit that these closings are the result of ad hoc political decision-making that is having a harsh impact on local communities, since it does not include a strategy to help them diversify their economy?

[English]

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of National Defence and Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ.

First, the Liberal Party in its red book called for a cut in defence spending. We acted on that in the budget. It was done in the budget because we felt we had to discharge our promise right away for the tax year beginning April 1, 1994.

The Auditor General is a very eminent individual and has done a lot of work. We work with him closely at national defence. I believe he acknowledges the fact that we are trying to improve on the suggestions he makes.

Without being disrespectful, I would say that the choice of whether or not we enact certain military expenditures in the budget or otherwise is a political decision made by the Government of Canada and not by the Auditor General.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Marc Jacob (Charlesbourg, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I may remind the minister that the red book also talked about defence conversion and diversification, neither of which has been done.

Instead of being criticized again next year by the Auditor General's office for his ad hoc decision to close the Collège militaire royal de Saint-Jean, would the minister not agree he should support the proposal by the mayor of Saint-Jean which provides for a transition period, in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past?

Hon. Marcel Massé (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Public Service Renewal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met the mayor of Saint-Jean today at noon to discuss his proposal. We agreed on the two main proposals: first, that CMR should be converted to civilian use, and second, that a period of transition is necessary to make CMR a post-secondary institution.

Having agreed on the principles, we concluded that the same principles formed the basis for the July 19 agreement. We both urge the Government of Quebec to accept the July 19 agreement