

Oral Questions

[English]

HEALTH**ISSUANCE OF SHELLFISH WARNING—REQUEST FOR MINISTER'S RESIGNATION**

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. In response to the question by my colleague, he claimed in the House this afternoon that the decision to issue the ban on all shellfish, including lobsters, did not emanate from his Department. I have in my hand a press release which states: "Health and Welfare Minister Jake Epp and Fisheries Minister Tom Siddon announced today an alert is in force on all shellfish from Atlantic Canada".

The Minister will know that his Department changed its story approximately 10 times on Friday as to what was in and what was out. Lobster was in, lobster was out. Mussels were in, other shellfish were out.

Does the Minister not recognize that the Canadian public can have absolutely no confidence in any of his health warnings right now because he has misled, us so many times, and that he should take the only responsible course and resign?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, no, I have not misled and I did not deny the health warning. Again, it is just one of the examples of her active imagination, saying one thing quite different from what I have said in the House.

I am saying to the Hon. Member that the health warning was put out for very good reasons, which I have given. I ask the Hon. Member: from her point of view, was the health warning not justified?

[Translation]

MINISTER'S CREDIBILITY

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, the Minister changed his mind ten times in one day. First lobsters were in, then they were withdrawn. How does the Minister expect the Canadian people to trust him when they know he changed his own story ten times last Friday? How can Canadians be expected to trust a Minister who deceived the House and deceived the Canadian people several times over?

[English]

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, that is not correct. The Hon. Member says: "Changed 10 times". That is also not correct. I think it is about time that her statements, which so often have proved to be incorrect, be given the scrutiny that they deserve. The only question that came forward from the hours that I gave was on the matter of scallops. It was not the others. It is about time that she stay with the truth.

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. It is clear that the Canadian people and the Canadian fishing industry have lost complete confidence in the Minister. First, the Minister delayed issuing health warnings and during that period people were hospitalized and died.

This weekend he created even more confusion with mixed messages which have seriously threatened the shellfish industry of Atlantic Canada and indeed the broader fishing industry of Atlantic Canada.

As the head of the Government, does the Prime Minister not agree that the only way to restore confidence is to have a full public inquiry into this matter and, pending the results of this inquiry, to accept the resignation of the Minister of National Health and Welfare?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I did not delay health warnings. That is incorrect, that is false. I did not. That was discussed last week, and that is the case.

Second, in terms of the issue, it was very clear that on the Friday, as I indicated before, in view of the investigation on mussels and the additional information that came forward on the Friday, the health warning was put forward. As I have said to her and others, the only part was on the matter of scallops and nothing more.

Ms. Mitchell: I can tell you that people who watched him on television last week had a very different perception from the one he is trying to create today. Five days is a long time to wait when there is a risk to health.

REQUEST THAT PRIME MINISTER SEEK MINISTER'S RESIGNATION

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): My supplementary question is directed to the Prime Minister, not the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Will he do the honourable thing, as Leader of the Government, supposedly, and insist that a full hearing be conducted and the Minister resign while the hearing is taking place?

• (1440)

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, again, the Hon. Member is incorrect. That is not the case at all. I said last week, and I am saying again this week—my story has not changed one iota—when I was informed, and I have the memo right in front of me, which was on the Monday of the 30th, additional work was done. I received the information on December 1, and that is when the health alert was given. It was nothing different. That has been the story last week. That is the story this week. I would ask the Hon. Member, if she wants to look at other people's reputations, then base hers as well on what is said in this House.