

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Blais (Solicitor General of Canada and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, this is a matter that concerns the other place. However, I have been informed that a request has been made to have the matter referred to a committee of the other place.

Furthermore, in the light of allegations made in the House and elsewhere, I can confirm to the House that this morning I was informed by the RCMP that it was now considering whether there was a case for conducting a formal investigation.

[English]

Ms. Mary Clancy (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice stated that the allegations against Senator Cogger should only be investigated by the other place.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Is it seriously the position of this government today that any and all matters relating to alleged improprieties by senators only be investigated by the senate?

An Hon. Member: He won't answer.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Blais (Solicitor General of Canada and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, it is too bad the hon. member did not listen to the answer to the previous question. I made it very clear that in the light of allegations made here in the House and elsewhere, the RCMP informed me it was now looking at all the facts to see whether there was a case for conducting a formal investigation. Again, my answer was quite clear, and it is still the same answer, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Ms. Clancy: Mr. Speaker, it is fortunate that we have the RCMP in this country so that they can press the cabinet into doing its job. I am still concerned about the way the cabinet looks at this. Thank heavens an investigation may be under way, wherever it started.

We are dealing here with allegations involving possible infractions of two Criminal Code sections. Given what the minister said yesterday, there is a lot of curiosity on this side of the House. Can the minister define for us which Criminal Code sections normally come under police authority and which ones he thinks belong only to the Senate?

An Hon. Member: That is out of order.

[Translation]

Mr. Blais: Mr. Speaker, it is not a minister's role to give legal opinions in this House. The RCMP is a police force that acts independently and conducts its own investigations. It is an honourable police force, and I think it should be allowed to conduct its investigation. It is not up to a minister to give the RCMP directives or legal opinions, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Energy. It pertains to Section 16 of the Parliament of Canada Act. I will just read part of it so the minister will know directly what I am asking about:

No member of the Senate shall receive or agree to receive any compensation directly or indirectly for services rendered or to be rendered to any person either by the member or another person

(b) for the purpose of influencing or attempting to influence any member of either House, that is to say, including a member of Parliament.

There is a report in the press today that Senator Cogger in fact arranged a meeting that included a couple of Conservative MPs, specifically the Member of Parliament for Châteauguay, for the purpose of influencing, so the story alleges, a decision ultimately to obtain funds from the Government of Canada.

The Minister has taken care to say that the senator in question did not contact the department at any time. He will agree that if he contacted a Member of Parliament with the purpose of trying to obtain influence and obtain a fee for that, he would be in violation of the statute I just quoted, the Parliament of Canada Act.

In exercising his responsibilities, has the minister ascertained whether that story in the press today is true or false?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have. Two points should be made. First, I understand that Senator Cogger has denied the allegations. I thought there was a tradition in this House that we do not question the word of members, and I think we should respect that.

Second, I asked the member whose name appears in the press today what the meeting and reference was about. I asked my departmental officials as well. There was no meeting relating to the department. There was no departmental official at any of the meetings referred to in the press. The meeting that took place, as it was