

Oral Questions

I urge the minister to make this kind of Senate reform an essential building block in a new constitutional agreement.

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SPORTS CHAMPIONS

Hon. Bob Layton (Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis): Mr. Speaker, it is a day for recognizing our champions.

This last weekend in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, the Lac St. Louis Lions won the title in the Air Canada Cup, a national midget hockey tournament and the Beaconsfield Lady Bison girls volleyball team captured the silver medal in the eastern Canadian finals at Charlottetown.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate coach Blair Mackasey of the Lions as well as coach Steve Leighton of Beaconsfield for their volleyball team.

[Translation]

On behalf of all residents of the riding of Lachine—Lac-Saint-Louis, I warmly congratulate the athletes on both teams, and I also want to say we are very proud to have them in the riding.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

EDUCATION

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. For seven and a half years the Prime Minister has said that he is taking action to fight illiteracy. That is what he has told Canadians during two terms of office.

According to a report issued today by the Economic Council of Canada, more than one in four young people in Canada cannot even read a newspaper article and almost half cannot add up a restaurant bill.

The council goes on to say that if we pursue our current policies, the policies of his government, our schools could well produce over a million functionally illiterate people in the next 10 years. Does the Prime Minister realize we are sitting on an education time bomb? What has he done to diffuse it?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. friend probably knows Canada spends more per capita on education than any other industrialized country in the world with the exception of Sweden. One of the factors that entered into the United Nations assessment of Canada as the number one nation in the world in which to live last week reflected on that commitment, broadly speaking, to education.

As usual my hon. friend has been selective in her choice of analysis coming from the report because the report indicates Canada is second only to the United States of America in average years of schooling. There are no significant gender differences of any kind in educational levels which is most encouraging, given the kinds of problems we are trying to solve—it was mentioned on the floor of the House of Commons yesterday—and the report says that access to post-secondary studies in Canada is significantly higher than most other countries in the world.

I would think my hon. friend might be able to see a little ray of sunshine in some of the things that are going on in Canada.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, I cannot find a ray of sunshine in the fact that almost half the young people in Canada cannot even add up a restaurant bill.

[Translation]

We know why the Prime Minister is winding up the Economic Council of Canada. He does not like being reminded that his policies are a total failure.

The Prime Minister can shut down the Economic Council, and he can try and muzzle his critics, but the fact remains that his policies are producing a generation of young people who do not know how to read and write. According to the Council, labour market adjustment programs are pitiful, training programs are pitiful, research and development is pitiful, and the same applies to the assistance given French schools outside Quebec. Every sector where the federal government has a role to play is a disaster area. Why, why, why?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am astonished that the Liberal Party of Canada should bring such a devastating indictment against the provinces which, after all, have jurisdiction over education in this country.