

● (1425)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

PUBLICLY FINANCED POLLS—AVAILABILITY OF RESULTS

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Last April I asked the Prime Minister if the government would, as a matter of policy, make available to all the people of Canada, through the House of Commons, all the information it was obtaining on the basis of publicly financed polls conducted by the government. The Prime Minister said then that he saw no trouble in principle and would get back to me. Being a patient fellow I waited until July. Then I wrote a letter making the same request. I got a reply yesterday from the Prime Minister saying that it turned out to be more complex than he had imagined.

Could the Prime Minister tell us what is so complex about a proposal that the people of Canada ought to have available to them opinions about themselves through polls which they have financed?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I would hope that my answer to the hon. member would have explained the facts to him, that the President of the Treasury Board and his officials are working together on compiling a list of all opinion polls conducted by the government over the last year or so. If there is a delay in providing the list, it is because we want to make sure that the responses of all departments are consistent with this spirit of the access to information bill. It should be available in a matter of weeks.

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, I have the letter here, and the last sentence in the letter from the Prime Minister says: "I would hope to be in a position to make much of the information available in the coming weeks." I think those words "much of the information"—not all of it—are rather significant. Therefore, I would like to ask the Prime Minister if he could establish for our benefit now the principles within which he is operating. In short, what is the principle that would justify the holding back of any opinion expressed by the people of Canada which the people of Canada are financing and is being collected by the government?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, I just indicated in my answer that the information supplied would be in conformity with the access to information bill and eventual law of the Canadian government. There are certain circumstances where the revealing of the facts, or the information, or the policies, at a specific time are counter-productive.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

An hon. Member: Such as the cost of your referendum.

Mr. Trudeau: This is what is stated in the access to information bill. There are certain circumstances where certain information would interfere, say, in international relations or in federal-provincial negotiations or in labour-management relations, and where we would want to hold the information until the result of the negotiations was made public.

Oral Questions

Mr. Broadbent: Madam Speaker, we are not asking for sensitive matters which may pertain to national defence or what have you. I find it difficult, in principle, to understand even polling on such a matter, but could conceive that in matters of state, or national security, there is some hypothetical possibility of the government wanting to withhold information. I say that as a matter of principle, although I cannot think of a concrete example. What I would like to get from the Prime Minister is assurance that the general rule will be that all such information will be made available.

The second question I have is this. I just learned yesterday that an agency well known to the Liberal party, namely Goldfarb Consultants, has been awarded a \$61,000 contract by the President of the Treasury Board to do a survey for the Department of Justice.

Mr. Crosbie: Shocking.

Mr. Broadbent: Specifically, could the Prime Minister or the minister tell us what the subject matter is of that survey? When will the data be in, and will it at least be made available to the people of Canada?

Mr. Trudeau: Madam Speaker, the hon. member asks that assurance be given, at least in principle, that we agree the information should be made available. That is the thrust of my answer, and that is what I said in my letter. The hon. member says he finds it difficult to justify hypothetical exceptions. Precisely. Let us wait to see whether there are any exceptions and then the hon. member will try to justify them.

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GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

THE CONSTITUTION—INQUIRY WHETHER PROGRAM WILL BE DISCONTINUED

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Justice my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Given the right hon. gentleman's new found interest in the noble institution of Parliament, I would like to ask the Prime Minister this. The advice that was contained in the famous leaked memo of August 30 reads as follows:

Ministers must recognize the distinction between advertising as a negotiating tactic and its use as a tool to sell the government's programs over the head of the opposition . . . Under these circumstances, ministers need to decide if advertising is politically legitimate.

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I want to ask the Prime Minister if, in the face of that information, it is the government's intention, in light of the fact that the measure is still before the House, to proceed with this advertising, which seriously undermines the role and the responsibility of Parliament?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!