

Oral Questions

The Minister will know that the Standards Council of Canada made a nation-wide candidate search at considerable public expense for a new executive director. Last June the Council made a unanimous recommendation that Mr. John Dumbille, a certified bilingual engineer with extensive background in standards, be appointed by Cabinet. Does the Minister also remember that just before Christmas, on December 23, the Cabinet passed a fast Order in Council naming instead Mr. John Woods, who just happens to be a former national director of the Liberal Party of Canada, as the Standards Council executive director?

I want to know from the Minister whether Mr. Woods was on the short list, or even on the original long list of applicants, and why no prior notice was given to this prestigious body which prides itself on being independent of political interference, and why its unanimous recommendation was overturned?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I think the Hon. Member, who has been very active on the urea-formaldehyde issue, will understand that it is very important to have people with good contacts in the business world, people who understand why standards are important and how they should be written here in Canada to prevent any future occurrences of the kind experienced by some owners of homes insulated with UFFI. Consequently, Madam Speaker, the Standards Council will have an executive director who has my full confidence, who is very competent and will do a very good job, that I am sure of.

[English]

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Madam Speaker, the question might well be asked: what does a Liberal know about standards?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

COUNCIL GUIDELINES

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): The fact remains, Madam Speaker, that members of the Standards Council are visibly upset, hurt, and embarrassed by the overturning of their unanimous decision last June to have Mr. Dumbille as executive director, and a Liberal hack substituted without prior notification.

Given the fact that Section 14(1) of the Standards Council of Canada Act stipulates that the Governor in Council, on the recommendation of the Standards Council, may appoint its executive director, what guidelines should members of the Standards Council now follow in order to avoid the Minister's passion for patronage?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I met with members of the executive of the Standards Council. We discussed the matter, and I think the Hon. Member's information is inaccurate.

[English]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT REVIEW AGENCY

INCREASE IN NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS APPROVED

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Right Hon. Prime Minister. On December 8, 1982, in response to questions by myself and the Leader of my Party regarding FIRA, he said, and I quote:

We are not weakening FIRA. We are making it more efficient.

We now find there is growing evidence to the contrary. I checked the published figures of FIRA itself and I find the number of applications allowed under the new Minister in charge of FIRA are the highest in the nine-year history of the Agency. Under the present Minister over 95 per cent of applications are allowed; under the previous Minister it was about 87 per cent; under the Tories it was 92 per cent; Jack Horner, 93 per cent.

In light of that kind of evidence I wonder if the Prime Minister will admit that the intention of the Government is really to weaken FIRA, and can he explain to the country why he is doing this at a time of high unemployment in Canada?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the short answer is no. An explanation of that is that at this time the Hon. Member should not be complaining that there is more investment, from whatever source, in Canada, because that is the source of jobs in Canada.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Madam Speaker, we are talking here about takeovers. The number of applications before FIRA has gone up this year by some 6 per cent, yet the number of disallowances has gone down to an all-time historic low. The Prime Minister made a promise in the 1980 campaign to strengthen FIRA, and he put that in the Throne Speech in April, 1980, as well.

I ask the Prime Minister why is the Foreign Investment Review Agency under the present Minister now approving over 95 per cent of applications received? Why is it turning down only just over 4 per cent, which is an historic low for that Agency? Why that abrupt change in policy since Herb Gray was the Minister four months ago?

• (1140)

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member will recall that the basic guideline of FIRA, in one sentence, is that investments be of significant benefit to Canada. I would think that almost everyone in the House would believe that investment would create jobs, would prevent Canadian firms from going under by creating work for the work force, and would be very welcome at this time. If the