

Oral Questions

Does the minister have anything to say to Canadians on waiting lists other than "just line up and shut up"?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that administration occurs on a daily basis and discussions on how to operate medical services within the provinces are completely provincial responsibilities. We are not running hospitals. They are run by provincial governments.

However, it is very difficult for me to understand that these people are always complaining that we should not spend money and should cut all the time but then they want us to increase payments to the provinces. I would like the member to say so and by how much. I will listen to him.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister continues to say we do not need more money in the system, but how much less do we need?

This rigid centralist solution will not work. This kind of government is why we are in so much trouble with health care and indeed with Quebec.

The provinces know this edict on semi-private clinics will not work. I call on the Prime Minister to abandon this approach. When will the Prime Minister join the provinces in real reform, real health care reform?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have established a forum on that. We have experts operating under my leadership on how to reform medicare. We have a problem with that in Canada. I recognize that. We included in our red book that it was to be reviewed. We have formed a committee of experts listening to the views of Canadians.

However in the meantime, and we said it very clearly, we have to reduce the cost of medicare from what it is today, 10 per cent of GDP, to around 9 per cent. It will be done although it will not be easy.

The provincial governments are also doing their share. They are cutting and we have to benefit a bit from their cuts because the federal government has deficit problems. Some provinces cut \$500 million so we must have the right to cut in relative terms if we want a balanced situation in Canada. We are having ongoing discussions with the provinces on this. I am happy to know that the Reform Party does not want us to spend more money on it.

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• (1430)

[Translation]

REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the no side shows how desperate it is when it

distorts, the way it just did, the comments I made on Saturday, by claiming they were sexist.

I want to ask the Prime Minister whether he would agree, as I said on Saturday, that the government must provide the right socio-economic conditions so that couples who want children and have none because they cannot afford it, would be able to have them?

I want to ask the Prime Minister whether he would agree that we must create the right socio-economic conditions so that couples who want children can afford to have them? I want to ask him whether he would agree that we must give them that option by creating conditions that will help them develop both their own and their children's potential?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the Leader of the Opposition is trying to do some damage control, considering the terrible blunder he made when he implied that since we are in Quebec, we are white. He then implied that Quebec—

You know, what is disturbing about the comments of the Leader of the Opposition is that to be a good Quebecer, it is better to be white than coloured and it is certainly better to speak French than English. If you are a separatist, you are a good Quebecer; if you are a federalist, you are not. If you happen to be a woman, maybe you should have more children.

This is a matter of personal choice for every woman. We may be in favour of certain policies in this respect but they should not be connected with race and with relationships that deny the equal status of men and women in society.

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is simply appalling that a Prime Minister should stoop to distorting comments to such an extraordinary degree. This is intolerable. Everybody knows there is a problem with the birth rate in Quebec and that it concerns all governments. Everyone knows that in Quebec many couples, and we all know people like that, would like to have children but cannot afford to.

So I want to ask him whether he does not realize that we will have to introduce appropriate measures for financial support, measures to make day care available to everyone, and I want to ask him whether he realizes that by threatening to cut social programs as he has started to do and will continue to do more and more after the no, he ignores the needs and interests of women and married couples?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since I am being accused of misquoting the Leader of the Opposition, I will read to you what he said: "Do you think it makes sense that we have so few children in Quebec? We are one of the white races that has the least children. That does not make sense". Are Quebecers members of the white race? There are Quebecers of every colour and every religion.