

Oral Questions

[Translation]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF MINISTER OF JUSTICE OF BULGARIA

Madam Speaker: I have the honour of bringing to the attention of the House the distinguished presence in our gallery of Mrs. Svelta Daskalova, the Minister of Justice of Bulgaria.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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[English]

NATIONAL PAROLE BOARD

ROLE OF SOLICITOR GENERAL

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Madam Speaker, may I put a question to the Prime Minister. Since he has now found that it is perfectly acceptable for the Solicitor General to attempt to influence a judge in his consideration of sentence, will he apply the same standard and find it acceptable that the Solicitor General can make similar representations to the National Parole Board?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I do not think that would be exactly the same situation. I would have to give consideration to the hon. member's request or question. The Parole Board comes directly under the authority of the minister, and the courts of justice do not, of course. If he were to make an application to the Parole Board through some open process wherein the Parole Board asks to hear character witnesses, I would withhold my judgment. Obviously if it is a communication directly to the Parole Board on behalf of another person, then he would not be acting in parallel to the case in the courts, where he acted in open court in a precise way.

I would have to hear more about the hypothetical situation from the hon. member. Is he asking if the Solicitor General could be a character witness in some hearing by the Parole Board, or is he asking if the minister could phone a member of the board directly and try to influence him?

RESPONSIBILITY FOR APPOINTING NEW MEMBERS

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister seems to be in some doubt about the propriety of making such representations by the Solicitor General to the National Parole Board. Since the Solicitor General today on departmental stationery—at least it was received in the mail today—announced the appointment of, I believe, four or five new members of the Parole Board, and until the Prime Minister has come to a crystallized decision on the propriety of that kind of representation, would he not consider that it might be advisable to remove the responsibility for appointing new members to the Parole Board from the Solicitor General, in the interim?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I do not think that is a constructive course because the Parole Board operates for hundreds of cases which have nothing to do with this one. I would not suggest it would be proper to hold up the process of parole for some prisoners who might be deserving of it, just because of a hypothetical question asked by the hon. member.

What I am prepared to do, as I suggested the other day, is to discuss a revision of the guidelines with anyone who is interested to see whether in the future we want to prevent ministers in any way from testifying in open court on any subject, or as character references. That is why I cannot accept the suggestion of the hon. member.

REQUEST THAT MINISTERIAL CONDUCT GUIDELINES BE REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Madam Speaker, since the matter has raised considerable interest and a fair degree of doubt, would the Prime Minister consider referring the question of the revision of the guidelines dealing with the conduct of ministers in this particular instance to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs so that recommendations could be made to the House and to the government with respect to updating them? This would ensure that every vestige of doubt about the propriety of conduct of ministers in situations like this would be removed.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Madam Speaker, I would be happy to receive the advice of opposition members and members of my own party about revision of the guidelines as they apply to the future.

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ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

QUERY RESPECTING TWINNING OF LOCKS

Mr. Gilbert Parent (Welland): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. Some months ago a joint committee was set up between Canada and the United States to study the shipping traffic between the two countries using the Welland Canal. I am told that that report has been completed and that there will be a substantial increase in the traffic. Can the minister tell the House if active consideration is being given to twinning the flight locks either at Thorold or Port Colborne at present or in the very near future?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, there has been quite a debate on that subject to which I have already referred. Some analyses, like the Misener report in Ontario, sees that dramatic jump into the next phase of the history of the Seaway as coming within five years, others say ten years. There is a joint study between Canada and the United States which says 18 years.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): What do you say?