

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take great pleasure in answering the hon. member's question.

What the government of Canada did in that instance was make a very important and valuable response to the issue of service delivery. We have basically amalgamated Revenue Canada and HRD services to provide one stop shopping for Quebecers.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, you will understand that I would have liked to get an answer from someone who is familiar with this matter.

Will the Prime Minister dare deny the fact that it is a highly partisan, arbitrary and illogical decision that the office of the Minister for Human Resources Development got directly from the Prime Minister's office?

[English]

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his questions. Anytime he would like to compare notes on this file, I will be willing to sit down with him.

The Government of Canada has increased points of service for Canadians from 450 to 750. Through the use of technology we have reduced the number of days required to file unemployment insurance claims from eight to two. Similarly, we have increased points of service for seniors by 400 per cent.

• (1455)

If the hon. member would like a further briefing, I will be available in my office.

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IRVING WHALE

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of the Environment.

The *Irving Whale* salvage feasibility study submitted to the coast guard in 1992 noted the presence of a heating fluid called Mansanto MGS 295S. Had someone read the report carefully they would have discovered that the fluid was Monsanto MCS 295S, a substance comprised of 80 per cent PCBs.

When the minister asked the RCMP to investigate a possible cover-up of the knowledge of PCBs, did she ask it also to investigate her own department to find out who made the mistake? It was obvious that cover-up was on her mind.

The Speaker: In the formulation of a question we always give the widest latitude, but we should be very careful not to impute motive in any way, especially in this particular context. I ask the hon. member to withdraw the last words.

Mr. Forseth: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the words. I was not imputing motive.

The Speaker: Thank you. The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on July 6 of this year I ordered an investigation into the circumstances as to whether and why the Canadian Environmental Protection Act was violated in that information regarding PCBs had not been forwarded to my department.

That preliminary investigation was concluded last week and the results were serious enough that I have turned the matter over to the Attorney General of Canada and to the RCMP for further investigation.

With the investigation in the hands of the RCMP it has the full latitude to investigate everybody, including me.

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the minister needs to accept ministerial responsibility for the actions of her own department.

On March 18, 1994 the minister tabled the 1992 report to which I referred. I would think if the minister tabled the material she is responsible for its contents. She has known since the tabling that PCBs were on board the *Irving Whale* barge.

It is amazing that the environment minister calls for a police investigation when the fault lies with her. Will the minister accept the responsibility for the report which she tabled and take the blame for the mishaps of her department, an open ended cost so far of \$12 million with still no results?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will accept my full responsibilities. Under the law of the people of Canada I was required in July to turn this matter over to an investigation because there was a possibility that evidence on the presence of PCBs had been withheld from the department specifically.

If the hon. member is suggesting I should break the law and ignore the requirement under CEPA to inform of the presence of PCBs by law, I will not. If he is suggesting I am attempting to deflect responsibility or am participating in a cover-up I will categorically deny that.

When I asked for the further investigation of the preliminary results by the attorney general and the RCMP, I made no bones about the openness of the RCMP to investigate everybody, including the actions of all departments of government.