

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Waddell: At this very moment, a group of young people is occupying the Welfare Office in Montreal. Does the Minister intend to meet this group in order to discuss the role of the federal Government and to help these people?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member, who made a special effort to put the question in French for Quebec listeners, will appreciate my answer.

We do not make a habit of intervening in areas that fall under provincial jurisdiction, especially when a demonstration has just started. Quebecers know perfectly well that although we reimburse 50 cents for every dollar spent on welfare and social services, including local community service centres, the province still decides how much is spent and on which programs. We intervene only to reimburse. That is why people have to go through officials channels to approach us, otherwise we would be meddling in provincial matters.

[English]

NATIONAL WELFARE STANDARD SUGGESTED

Mr. Ian Waddell (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, the Minister must be aware that in Quebec you have single unemployable people under 30 on welfare who get about \$150 a month, whereas if you are over 30 you get about \$400. This is happening in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and so on. Has the Minister vetted the question of whether this is constitutional, especially after the anti-discrimination parts of the Constitution come into effect next year? In addition, would she agree with me that perhaps we have to look at a national standard which can be applied across the country? We cannot really discriminate against young people like this, especially when they are twice as likely to be unemployed as older people.

[Translation]

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member is not aware of the situation in Quebec and of what is being done under the Canada Assistance Plan for young people in Quebec. For the Government of Canada, I have approved and put my signature on a pilot project, under the welfare program, for young people on welfare. The project is supposed to help them in a number of areas and in a very specific way. While the basic rule is that the project is not compulsory, they are given an opportunity to receive additional benefits as they upgrade their training and apprenticeship and if they work in various industries or community services.

Therefore, we are very involved. Let us say that whenever a province has a good idea, we help bring it to fruition.

The second part of the Hon. Member's question refers to the level of welfare payments.

[English]

The answer to that is, yes, I wish there were national standards discussed and decided by the whole country. Every province has welfare benefits below the poverty line. I think it is crystal clear, and we have said it often. We have made the public as aware as we can of that most unfortunate fact. But, again, I cannot negate the Constitution. It is there to help Canada function, has served us very well, and it is the provinces which must decide on the rates, and then we give them back 50 cents on the dollar.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

CANADIAN MEMBERSHIP IN UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION

Mr. Norman Kelly (Scarborough Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister responsible for the status of women. Next year there will be a world conference to celebrate the end of the United Nations decade for women. Can the Minister tell us if Canada is participating in this conference and what we are doing to prepare for it?

Hon. Judy Erola (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that the Hon. Member for Scarborough Centre has brought up this matter today. I am very pleased to say that on May 23, in New York, at the spring session of the Economic and Social Council, Canada was re-elected to the United Nations Status of Women Commission. I might add that we were the only incumbent nation to be re-elected. It is especially important we remain on the Commission because we are deep into preparations for the 1985 Conference in Nairobi. This, of course, ensures that we will have a very real part to play in the Nairobi Conference.

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ENERGY

REMOVAL OF ONTARIO RADIOACTIVE WASTE

Mr. John Gamble (York North): Mr. Speaker, my question is for whatever Minister is responding for the Minister of Energy. On November 3, 1983, the Minister of Energy, on behalf of the Government of Canada, put his signature to a contract with the Government of Ontario for the temporary removal and storage of low level radioactive waste from the Malvern subdivision in Scarborough to an area in Scarborough on Reesor Road, close to the border of York North.

Clause I of that contract indicates that the federal Government assumes responsibility, to use the words of the contract, to remove and permanently dispose of the Malvern waste. Having regard to that clause, why did the federal Government participate in the removal, and temporary storage in what amounts to a large plastic bag, of low level radioactive waste on a two acre site close to the border of York North?