

Oral Questions

women's groups, which have shrunk by over \$4 million over the past six years and are getting smaller every year.

How can the Secretary of State for the Status of Women justify these new cuts to organizations working with disadvantaged women when pride and dignity is all her Prime Minister ever talked about during the last election campaign?

Hon. Sheila Finestone (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud and confident of our government's unequivocal commitment to equality for women, period.

I must remind my hon. colleague that we have restored the Court Challenges Program, are setting up health centers of excellence for women and are working on sentencing reform, firearms control, employment equity and small business issues, all with women in mind. I think this clearly shows our concern for equality for women.

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): I have a supplementary, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State for the Status of Women is said to have informed women's groups before the budget was tabled that the criteria for grants would be reviewed by next fall.

Does the hon. secretary of state intend to hold consultations with these groups in developing these new criteria? If so, how much weight will she give to the results of these consultations in making her final decision?

Hon. Sheila Finestone (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate the Bloc's concern for the status of Canadian women. I think this suggests it recognizes that equity and unity are going strong in Canada.

In this regard, she must recognize that our February budget did not contain any cuts in grants or contributions to women's groups. And I told women just that: "No cuts in grants or contributions". I told women and I repeat that the opinion of women from all regions of Canada will be taken into consideration when budget adjustments are made. I hope that the Bloc Québécois is interested in the well-being of all women in Canada.

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• (1450)

[English]

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Mr. Nick Discepola (Vaudreuil, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the west island of Montreal, indeed the whole region, was shocked to learn of the brutal murder of Reverend Frank Toope and his wife, Jocelyn. Three youths have been charged with the first degree murder of the retired couple. The victims were battered to death with a baseball bat.

Can the Minister of Justice assure this House that with the amendments to the Young Offenders Act currently before the Senate, young violent offenders will no longer be able to hide behind the law? Will justice be served for the victims, their families, the offenders and most of all for society?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the tragic deaths of Reverend and Mrs. Toope have shocked and saddened the community of Beaconsfield. All Canadians have been touched by the senselessness of this brutal crime. As the hon. member has said, people have been charged and the case is now before the courts. I will be careful not to comment on the facts of that case. Let me speak more broadly to the issues the member has raised.

The government cannot say that merely changing words in a statute, in a book, is going to prevent tragedies like this from happening. We know that is not so. A number of things are required to prevent crime and to get at its causes.

To the extent to which changes in the criminal law and the Young Offenders Act can deter and properly punish such misconduct, this government has acted. Bill C-37, which is through the House, is now before the Senate and I hope it will receive its prompt attention. As the House knows, that bill increases penalties for murder. It provides for the transfer to adult court of certain youths charged with serious violent crimes. It provides for the sharing of information.

I have also asked for the justice committee to tour the country, to listen to Canadians, to examine our juvenile justice system and determine whether other changes are needed. This government will be responsive to those recommendations. We are committed to a system that is fair and tough. We will act on that conviction.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is in regard to the aforementioned horror which took place in Montreal. Two citizens were brutally, coldly and with extreme calculation bludgeoned to death by three young offenders. These murders were coldly planned homicides without remorse.

Will the justice minister assure the people of Canada by insisting that the 14 and 15-year old psychopath young offenders be tried in adult court?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I fully understand how Canadians, including members of the House, react to the horror and tragedy of events such as these.

I do urge the hon. member to bear in mind that the judicial process must run its course. There are people charged who are presumed innocent. There will be a trial. The crown will proffer evidence and a court will decide who is responsible. We must not prejudice that process.

Let me say in response to the point raised by the hon. member that any decision on whether or not to seek a transfer to adult