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Daily Hansard

25 Mar 2015 : Column 1413

House of Commons

Wednesday 25 March 2015

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

(...)

Rory Stewart (Penrith and The Border) (Con): One of the most disturbing scandals has been the infection of thousands of people across the nation with HIV and hepatitis C through contaminated blood. Today Lord Penrose publishes a report that follows nearly 25 years of campaigning by Members on both sides of this House to address the scandal. Will the Prime Minister, as the last act of his Government, ensure that there is a full apology, transparent publication and, above all, proper compensation for the families terribly affected by this scandal?

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The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this, with the Penrose report being published today. I can do all of the three things he asks for. I know that many Members on all sides of this House have raised the question of infected blood, and I have spoken about how constituents have been to my surgeries. While it will be for the next Government to take account of these findings, it is right that we use this moment to recognise the pain and the suffering experienced by people as a result of this tragedy. It is difficult to imagine the feelings of unfairness that people must feel at being infected with something like hepatitis C or HIV as a result of a totally unrelated treatment within the NHS. To each and every one of those people, I would like to say sorry on behalf of the Government for something that should not have happened.

No amount of money can ever fully make up for what did happen, but it is vital that we move as soon as possible to improve the way that payments are made to those infected by this blood. I can confirm today that the Government will provide up to £25 million in 2015-16 to support any transitional arrangements to a better payments system. I commit that, if I am Prime Minister in May, we will respond to the findings of this report as a matter of priority.

Finally, I know that Lord Penrose was unable to present the findings of his report today because of illness. I am sure the whole House would want to send him our very best wishes.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): Let me first say that I fully associate myself with the remarks that the Prime Minister has just made about the victims of infected blood. We undertake today to act on those recommendations as well. I also join the Prime Minister in offering my condolences to the families who lost loved ones in the devastating plane crash yesterday, especially remembering the three British victims. Our thoughts are with all the victims, their families and their friends.

On Monday, the Prime Minister announced his retirement plans. He said that it was because he believed in giving straight answers to straight questions. After five years of Prime Minister's questions, that was music to my ears. So here is a straight question: will he now rule out a rise in VAT?

(...)