

Wed, October 27, 2004

Martin 'lying,' Copps asserts

By **KATHLEEN HARRIS**, Ottawa Bureau

OTTAWA -- Politician-turned-author Sheila Copps accused Prime Minister Paul Martin of lying to Canadians about his past plans to scrap the Canada Health Act yesterday, as the key figure who could corroborate her claims shot holes in her version of events. Copps, who has also fingered her former leadership rival for plotting to scale back old-age pensions, scuttle Kyoto commitments and send troops to Iraq, shot back at Martin's rebuttal the day before.

"He's lying. Of course he's lying," Copps told Sun Media.

Faced with a barrage of denials about explosive claims made in her new book *Worth Fighting For*, Copps ruled out any possibility her recollection of events could be hazy. She said it was a "very vivid moment" when she received the faxed draft budget document at home from then-deputy finance minister David Dodge.

But Dodge, now governor of the Bank of Canada, poked holes in Copps' account in a statement read to the Commons finance committee. The government was desperate to slay the deficit, but tinkering with the health act wasn't on the table, he said.

"There was never any suggestion to modify the Canada Health Act as part of this exercise," he said.

Dodge also denied he ever faxed or sent the documents to Copps' home, insisting it would be contrary to pre-budget security practices. But he did acknowledge that after the budget was tabled, Copps was a strong voice for legislative amendments that led to word changes of the health and social transfer.

Dodge wouldn't speculate on whether Copps was spinning a tale or having a lapse in memory.

'MIXED UP'

"It's very easy, in 10 years, to get mixed up about which document and when," he said after the committee meeting. "We worked very closely with her on the putting together of the implementation bill which followed the budget."

Earlier in the day, Copps had predicted Dodge would deny her claims. "The man's got his job from the prime minister -- what else is he going to say?"

Copps said she's growing frustrated people are assuming explanations that come from the PMO are "automatically right."

"Official Ottawa has brought down the golden hammer on this book big time," she said. "That's how Paul Martin operates ... he's very good at getting other people to do his dirty work."