

Oral Questions

Pursuant to section 120(1) of the regulations implementing the Explosives Act, ammunition shall not be sold to a person under the age of sixteen, unless the person can produce a valid permit issued in accordance with the Criminal Code. It is then the responsibility of the merchant to establish the age of the buyer. The regulations came into force on January 18, 1990, and impose restrictions regarding the age of the buyers for other types of explosives as well, including pyrotechnic devices. As a general rule, you must be at least eighteen years old to buy other types of explosives and the related material.

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TRANSFER PAYMENTS TO PROVINCES

Mr. Nic Leblanc (Longueuil): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. Experts from our national bank say that transfer payments largely benefited the richest provinces and fueled inflation in these provinces during the past few years. We also know that the minister's high interest rate policy is aimed at reducing inflation in these same provinces. Not only is Quebec at a disadvantage but it is paying for the mistakes made by these provinces and the federal government. Does the Minister of Finance intend to do something about that and to compensate the damages caused to Quebec's economy?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the transfer payments benefit all provinces as regards some programs. The Established Programs Financing, the payment that is most important to the province of Quebec equalization, the province of Quebec is the largest beneficiary of that program by a substantial margin. We do have the normal review of equalization coming up, I believe, in a year or a year and a half's time. Those discussions are under way. There are representations that have been made by a number of provinces in the course of this review, Quebec being one of them. We want to allow those discussions to proceed before making any decisions on equalization.

[Translation]

Mr. Nic Leblanc (Longueuil): I was not referring to equalization, Mr. Speaker. I am talking about transfer payments to provinces under bilateral agreement concerning programs. What I mean is that Quebec is losing billions of dollars because of that policy. Will the federal

government compensate Quebec for the billions of dollars the province and the people of Quebec have lost because that monetary policy penalized Quebec during many years?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, there are the Established Programs Financing transfer payments which are on an equal per capita basis, regardless of the province, so that Quebec has equal access to that program in the same way as Ontario or British Columbia or Nova Scotia.

As far as the payments for equalization are concerned, Quebec has a major benefit in that program as the largest beneficiary of that payment. All the other programs of transfer payments are a good deal lower than those two payments, the next one being the Canada Assistance Program. Again, that is on a 50-50 cost-sharing basis. For every dollar that Quebec spends, the federal government spends an equal amount of money. So, Quebec is not being disadvantaged by any of these programs.

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CANADA POST

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Essex—Kent): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the minister responsible for Canada Post. Canada Post has removed postal services from hundreds of small Canadian communities, forcing many Canadian citizens to drive as far as 22 kilometres just to mail a letter or receive mail. The \$149 million Canada Post had in profits is at the personal expense of many rural citizens. Will the minister, in fairness to all Canadians, guarantee equal postal services to everyone?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, I suggest the hon. member get somebody else to write his questions for him because they are distorting the facts entirely.

There have not been hundreds of closures. There have been several hundred new post offices opened. There have not been any of the closures the gentleman is talking about. We have independent auditors who say that the service is getting better and that there has never been a time, in the 150 years of postal history, when everybody received the same postal service because everybody does not live in the same circumstances. I