

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of the Environment, I am happy to confirm to my hon. friend that his comprehensive and, I believe, quite impressive work in bringing forward a major action plan is proceeding along course.

• (1450)

I met with the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association on Friday and indicated to them, as we have to other groups including environmental lobbies that, while we will be consulting with them, it is the government's intention to follow through on a commitment of sustainable development which moves the cause of the environment to the top of the national agenda, but which does not cripple development in Canada which means jobs for Canadians.

It is perhaps for this reason that Mr. Shevardnadze, the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union, following the commentary of former Prime Minister Brundtland, stated:

Canada was one of the first to place questions of environmental protection on the international agenda and has achieved remarkable successes in this area. Therefore, we attach great significance to and regard as an encouraging beginning the environmental accord signed with Canada in Moscow.

The international leaders recognize it. I urge the hon. gentleman to read and stop complaining.

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GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, my question for the Minister of Finance concerns the impact that the goods and services tax will have on disabled Canadians.

While the minister proposes not to tax wheelchairs themselves, he would like to tax all repairs on them to tires, seats, and brakes. Why should handicapped Canadians be asked to pay tax on what are clearly essential needs?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has pointed out quite clearly how we have tried to identify certain things that are used by disabled people. That is why a number of medical

devices have been made tax free, and I am pleased that she acknowledges that.

With regard to the specific question that she has asked, it is very difficult through the tax system to draw distinctions between repairs to certain types of equipment and repairs to other types of equipment. That is very difficult to do, but I appreciate her sensitivity to that issue.

Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the same minister.

Now that he has confirmed that he would like to tax repairs to wheelchairs, will he also confirm that he would even like to tax grandmothers for their hearing aid batteries, or would he rather that they not hear about the evils of the GST?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the hon. member understands that hearing aid batteries are taxable today. She should acknowledge that when she asks a question like that, rather than trying to get some cheap political benefits from the type of question that she is asking.

We have made it clear that hearing aids are not going to be taxed, glasses will not be taxed. Other forms of medical devices, prescription drugs, and medical services will not be taxed. Therefore, in a number of areas we are responding to the sentiment that she is expressing, but we are trying to do so in a way that recognizes the problems that people have without getting cheap political gain for it.

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COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Ian Waddell (Port Moody—Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Communications and it is about cable TV rates.

We in the New Democratic Party believe that Canadians are paying too much money for cable television. Cable profits are now about 32 per cent on fixed assets. That is about twice the amount that phone companies get because phone companies are regulated by law.

Will the government bring in a law which will regulate the rate of return for cable companies like we have done for phone companies?