

Oral Questions

distinguished guest who just arrived, the Honourable Secretary of Commerce for Mexico, Mr. Licenciado Jorge de la Vega Dominguez.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

VALUE OF LAND AND MINERAL RIGHT GRANTS

Mr. Bill McKnight (Kindersley-Lloydminster): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. Could he explain to the House if he plans to initiate a study into the present day asset value of land and mineral rights which were granted to CPR in past years?

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, mention has been made of that. It will be a decision for cabinet to make.

Mr. McKnight: Madam Speaker, I do not know the pecking order of the minister's cabinet. If it is not government policy and there has not been a cabinet decision on it, why is it that his assistant in the Senate, Senator Argue, was quoted yesterday in the Saskatoon *Star Phoenix* as saying that he will have it initiated before the end of this year?

Mr. Pepin: Madam Speaker, it is traditional in democratic governments when a decision has not been made by cabinet for members of the cabinet to express their views.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

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PUBLIC SERVICE

DISPUTE INVOLVING VETERINARIANS IN ONTARIO AND QUEBEC—EFFORTS TO REACH SETTLEMENT

Mr. Gus Mitges (Grey-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board. Salary negotiations have reached an impasse between veterinarians employed by the health of animals branch of Agriculture Canada and the Treasury Board. It has culminated today in strike action by veterinary inspectors in Ontario and Quebec closing all the federally-inspected abattoirs in Quebec and most of them in Ontario. In view of the fact that a general strike across Canada would have disastrous results for consumers, the livestock industry, the meatpacking industry and our exports, will the President of the Treasury Board intervene personally, meet with representatives of the veterinary group and bargain in good faith to formulate a salary schedule which will recognize a long overdue inequity to this group of dedicated public servants?

Hon. Donald J. Johnston (President of the Treasury Board): Madam Speaker, my understanding is that both parties have been negotiating in good faith. There appears to have

been an illegal walkout and I would hope that matters will return to normal in a matter of hours. It is also my understanding that considerable progress has been made through a mediator. I suspect a fair and just settlement will be reached in the very near future.

Mr. Mitges: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same minister. The health of animals branch recognizes that there has been a big problem in recruiting veterinarians for some time. According to the Public Service Commission of Canada there is already a veterinary vacancy rate of 32.4 per cent, caused primarily by a totally unacceptable low salary range. In view of the fact that no apparent effort has been undertaken to alleviate this very serious situation, would the President of the Treasury Board not agree that a starting salary of \$17,660 for veterinarians in federal government service is not only a deterrent to recruitment, but an insult beyond any stretch of the imagination to every veterinarian in the country being offered such a ridiculous amount in this day and age after six years of university training?

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, this particular group, as all other groups with which we bargain, is subject to our rules of total compensation comparability. I can assure the hon. member that if there are major inequities they will certainly be adjusted during the current negotiation.

With respect to the vacancy factor to which the hon. member made reference, he might direct his question to the Minister of Agriculture. But it is my understanding that there are a number of posts left vacant deliberately and that the Department of Agriculture is seeking to recruit, I believe, something in the neighbourhood of a 5 per cent to 10 per cent increase in those posts; not the 32 per cent to which the hon. member made reference.

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WESTERN DEVELOPMENT FUND

IMPROVEMENT OF INSUFFICIENT WATER SUPPLIES

Mr. Bert Hargrave (Medicine Hat): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance respecting his recent speech to the Canadian Club at Montreal last Monday. I should like to draw his attention to the direct reference to the \$4 billion western development fund, \$2 billion of which will be spent over the next three years as a catalyst for co-operative efforts with the governments and people of western Canada to ensure that potential constraints to longer-term development, such as inadequate transportation services or insufficient water supplies, are addressed on a timely and effective basis.

Would the Minister of Finance enlarge somewhat on that very specific reference to insufficient water supplies in the west? It has a very special meaning for me, and I hope he will respond in some way to that reference.