

Oral Questions

Given the fact that seeding time is not far away, I want to ask the minister if it is possible to say whether there will be an interim payment or not. If so, how much will it be and when will it go out to producers?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, the Western Grain Stabilization Act provides for joint funding by producers and the federal government to assist producers in times of falling grain prices.

We are in a situation now because of world grain prices being very low that the fund will trigger a payment this year. I am happy to announce today that we will be putting cheques in the mail to producers at the end of this week.

The total amount will be \$158 million.

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NATIONAL UNITY

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Often on this side of the House, we disagree with the Prime Minister in a great many policy areas. On the question of Canada and the obligation we, in this House, have to do what we can to work together to keep this country united, we agree with the Prime Minister.

I want to ask the Prime Minister: How is the cause of national unity strengthened and fostered when the Prime Minister, as he did yesterday, began this phase of this important debate in our nation's history by spending a good part of the Question Period attacking the Leader of the Opposition who is not here, and by attacking premiers who are not here to defend themselves?

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that is a question. Perhaps the hon. member would put a direct question to the government.

Mr. Tobin: I do not know how else, but to say to the Prime Minister: If we are going to work together in this Parliament among the parties and all the players, the provinces, to rebuild Canada, that requires trust, sharing information and opening up the backroom process to build a team to restructure this country.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

• (1500)

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the comments by my hon. friend in regard to the intentions of his party to contribute constructively to the debate. I take that in good faith. Indeed, it would probably be a major contribution that we could all make to the country, given the seriousness of the challenge confronting us, if all of us undertook to depoliticize this very important issue and work together on behalf of a united Canada.

I do not want to digress or diverge from what I have just said, but my friend says that the Prime Minister began this phase by attacking the Leader of the Opposition yesterday. I did not. What began were comments from the Leader of the Opposition, to which I responded.

That being said, I want to accept my share of responsibility in terms of partisanship and give my hon. friend the following undertaking: The importance of this issue is such that all of us should go the extra mile to avoid partisanship in dealing with this fundamental question of national unity, and I tell my hon. friend that if that is the position of the Liberal Party and the NDP, it is one that I will follow suit on and respect.

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for my demonstration of frustration and anger a moment ago.

In supplementary to the Prime Minister, I accept what the Prime Minister has said and I say to him on behalf of this party and on behalf of all Canadians that we want to be part of a constructive process.

Will the Prime Minister at the earliest opportunity please share with all members of Parliament the plans, the designs, and the process that the Prime Minister alluded to yesterday so that we can work constructively and collectively to give this country a fighting chance?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my friend says that he wishes to be part of a constructive process and to work collectively. I think that is already an important contribution to the most important debate that will be confronting this country in an extended period of time. I thank him for that.

I give him the assurance, as Prime Minister of Canada, that we will work collectively and constructively with him and all of his colleagues to make sure that Canada does indeed remain a strong and united country.