

*Oral Questions*

and has already benefited from the programs of our departments, both as provided by the act on direct assistance to industry or the joint assistance of the two levels of government. We have revised those programs over the last few months. We have looked into the designation of that area and what that could give it concretely, as well as other alternatives, such as joint action with the provincial government or with other government levels or other departments in Ottawa. Just a few days ago I received a progress report on those negotiations and I still hope that the best decision can be reached between the various levels of government which were consulted and myself, so that we can come up with what could prove to be the best possible program under the circumstances.

**Mr. Lapsire:** Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary. Considering that several in-depth studies on the economic and industrial situation in that area have already been made by the Société d'aménagement de l'Outaouais and by several other agencies which represent that area; considering that the rate of unemployment is continuously increasing compared to the provincial rate and that the rate of industrial growth is the lowest in Quebec, can the minister say whether he is really interested in that file and whether he intends to urge a solution for that area, as he has just said?

**Mr. Lessard:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am really interested in that file, and I have been for several months, but I am not the only one who takes an interest in that file; so do hon. members on this side, particularly those who represent the national capital region and the Outaouais area, the hon. members for Hull, Gatineau and Pontiac. We work together to find what would be the best solution for the development of the Outaouais area. So far, however, I am not satisfied that the mere fact of designating the area to make it eligible for industrial grants could meet the needs of the Outaouais area. Such a measure has already been applied to the area and it did not produce the expected effects. We were subjected to hard criticism by some people in the Outaouais area because that program was not considered as sufficient in the face of the difficulties. I do not intend to propose again the designation of the area, if it is the kind of reception we can expect. I would rather establish a concerted plan which will meet not only the needs but also the potential of the Outaouais area.

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● (1432)

[English]

### CONSUMER AFFAIRS

#### INVESTIGATION INTO RISING FOOD PRICES

**Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. Given the fact that the Centre for the Study of Inflation and Productivity, which released its report yesterday

[Mr. Lessard.]

or today, has no investigatory powers but has available to it the same sources of information that are available to the minister, namely, the Consumer Price Index, given the fact that the CPI has shown a steady increase in the price of food and that CSIP reacted to these food price increases by saying, "The rapid increase in food prices over last year can be placed on soaring profits for food and beverage manufacturers", what steps is the minister taking within his department to ensure that consumers in Canada are not being ripped off? What ongoing investigations are under way within his department in the area of food prices?

**Hon. Warren Allmand (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, it is not correct that we have the same capability as CSIP for price monitoring. As a matter of fact, the price monitoring capability for government is now centred in CSIP.

However, we do have the capability of receiving the reports. We have the report that was tabled yesterday and, as I answered an hon. member, I will be giving it very serious consideration and will be attempting to determine why there are differences in this report from the AIB report which was tabled in June, which indicated a smaller and more reasonable profit on the part of industries in the food business. Once these reports are analysed, we will attempt to take some action to help consumers.

**Mr. McGrath:** Mr. Speaker, the minister does have the power to investigate and I would like to give him a specific area. Last week in this House, in answer to questions put to the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs with respect to increases in the price of turkeys, the Minister of Agriculture said that the price increases could not be justified; that there were, in fact, adequate supplies on hand and that producers were only getting a 4 per cent increase, whereas the minister said that prices would be going up because supplies had declined.

Who speaks for the government? What is the minister doing to lay the facts on the floor of the House of Commons and to tell the people of Canada why, for example, turkey prices in this country today are as high as \$1.65 a pound. What is the minister doing about that?

**Mr. Allmand:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is mixing turkeys and prices in general. That is not unusual for him. We do not have a price monitoring unit in our department. The price monitoring unit for the government is now with CSIP, under the Economic Council. I suggest that the hon. member check his facts on that. However, we do have the capability of examining the reports that are presented by the AIB and CSIP and suggesting action to deal with these problems. That has been done in the past and I will do it again.

With respect to turkeys, what I said to the House the other day was that as of November 1 this year we had only 50 million pounds of stock available, whereas last year at the same time there were 72 million pounds of stock. This is a decreased supply, in a situation where demand has increased.