

Oral Questions

serious problems that one sector of the forest industry is facing at the present time, namely, the pulp and paper sector?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for forestry is unfortunately detained outside of the House. He might be able to expand further in this respect at a later time. I would like to bring to the attention of the hon. member that under the jurisdiction of the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, a sectorial study of the forest industry is being carried on by officials of the forestry department. This sectorial study of the pulp and paper industry is very advanced. If the hon. member wishes to ask further questions of the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, he will be able to provide him with more information.

The pulp and paper industry has been identified as an important area in terms of our industrial strategy and there is federal, provincial and private sector consultation at the present time with regard to this whole matter.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, it is clearly the intention of all the provinces to require the federal government to re-initiate a federal forestry policy. It is true there are 27 different departments meddling in this very important segment, not only of our economy, but of our lives, our environment and all ecological questions that arise. Can the minister assure the House, today, that the minister of forestry and the environment will assume jurisdiction over the 27 departments and address himself to this very serious matter?

Mr. Lalonde: I would like to say to the hon. member that there is at least a slight exaggeration in the number he has mentioned. As far as the forestry policy of the federal government is concerned, it is at the present time under the direction and control of the minister responsible for forestry. He is also actively involved in consultations, as I have said, with the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce respecting the situation in the pulp and paper industry. I would hope that those consultations, which involve the provinces and the private sector, will prove extremely fruitful with regard to this very important industry.

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GRAIN**REASON FOR DELAY IN MAKING STABILIZATION PAYMENTS**

Mr. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon-Biggar): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board. What is holding up the calculation and payments under the Western Grain Stabilization Act? The minister will know that with skyrocketing prices for farm items, and the fact that the farmer requires his money right now in order to get into production, it is a very important time for him. What is holding up the minister's statement on this particular payment?

[Mr. Oberle.]

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, essentially, the calculations take some time. The figures are somewhat complex. I indicated several weeks ago that I expected, perhaps by the end of March, to be able to indicate the nature of the payment and also the timing of the payment. That is still a distinct possibility. There was a significant delay in the reporting of grain receipts by the grain companies. These came in much later than they should, including throughout February and into early March. In order to get all the reports in, we had to impose a March 15 deadline. That has obviously delayed completion of the calculation. But, as I say, I hope within the next ten days to be able to make an announcement.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I know that the minister would not want to be accused of making these announcements and payments just before a federal election; I will not even suggest it on the floor of the House.

An hon. Member: Not Otto.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Listening to him and looking at him, he appears to have been burned again for some reason. I would ask him, in the interest of making this plan more responsive to the realities of western Canada, whether he would give serious consideration to the suggestions made on our side of the House for a more regional approach to the payments, or indeed on an individual basis, so that farmers would get payments on a regular basis and not on a basis dictated by events like national elections every few years.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member may have forgotten that I indicated quite clearly that I would be prepared to work toward a regionally-based plan—indeed, that is written into the bill—but we have not yet come up with a satisfactory system for doing that. The advisory committee, composed of producers has from time to time looked at the question. We do not have a solution to the regional issue. As far as timing is concerned, I indicated at the time the bill was going through the House, and I have indicated year after year since, that the month of April is the right time for a payment when one is due. It is now apparent that this year one will be due for the 1977 year. I am as anxious as anyone to get the amount determined and the payment into farmers' hands.

An hon. Member: Just before the election.

Mr. Lang: I am certainly aware of how badly farmers need cash, particularly at seeding time. I heard the hon. member's suggestion that this payment is related to an election, and it may well be close—

An hon. Member: No!

Mr. Lang:—but for years we have said that the payment should be made in April. I think that is a statement he really should not make, in all conscience—certainly not among friends.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!