

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister and relates to the visit to Canada of Soviet President Gorbachev.

As we said in a statement issued today, we in the Official Opposition welcome this visit and look forward to it strengthening relations between our two countries.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Gray (Windsor West): Canada's agreement for wheat sales to the Soviet Union expires next summer. Yet we understand that the Soviet Union has recently secured arrangements for the purchase of wheat from Argentina and the United States. The Soviet Union is one of Canada's most important wheat customers, taking one-quarter of our exports.

Will the Prime Minister of Canada and Soviet President Gorbachev be signing a new wheat agreement during the President's visit to Ottawa today and tomorrow?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I share with the hon. Leader of the Opposition the need to co-operate on a bilateral basis with the Soviet Union, particularly in the area of trade and cultural exchange.

We have had a ongoing trade relationship with the Soviet Union, particularly in the area of grains and oilseeds. The existing long-term agreement between Canada and the Soviet Union will expire on July 31, 1991. Preliminary discussions have already begun on renewal under the auspices of the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds, and obviously the Prime Minister will be raising this issue with Mr. Gorbachev during the bilateral exchange that will occur on the occasion of his visit.

ARCTIC ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question as well for the Deputy Prime Minister.

We know that Canada and the Soviet Union occupy a large part of the vast, ecologically fragile Arctic region.

We know that Canada and the Soviet Union last November signed an agreement on the Arctic environment that put sustainable development at the forefront of their bilateral relations.

Therefore, can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us what concrete action has been taken since this agreement was signed and what will the Prime Minister of Canada actually do to protect the fragile Arctic environment and have true sustainable development in this important region of our world?

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, this was raised during the reception at the airport. When the President arrived he mentioned the importance of co-operation in Arctic matters, and particularly the enhancement and preservation of the environment in that very sensitive and delicate area.

This will obviously be a part of the bilateral discussions, as well as items such as the future of the European architecture, the Baltic republics, the ongoing bilateral relations that exist between Canada and the Soviet Union, the ongoing disarmament talks, and of course east-west relations in a general sense.

Obviously the point that the Leader of the Opposition makes is a very valid one. Both the Prime Minister and the President have indicated that this will be a topic for discussion.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a further supplementary for the Deputy Prime Minister. When members of the Official Opposition were in the Soviet Union recently they were disturbed to hear reports of a possible decision by the Soviet Union to shift its nuclear testing to sites in the Soviet Arctic in 1995.