

*Oral Questions*

convenient time thereafter to consider the question of Senate reform.

It was my understanding that all First Ministers who signed that communiqué in Edmonton last summer believed that a condition precedent to consideration of this kind of constitutional reform was a mutually satisfactory resolution of the question of bringing Quebec back into Confederation.

## GOVERNMENT POLICY

**Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry):** Mr. Speaker, I can certainly tell the Prime Minister that the report of the western caucus of our Party which was made today endorses that principle, based upon very extensive discussions with westerners about its need.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**An Hon. Member:** All one of them.

**Mr. Hnatyshyn:** Was it with the Senators?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please.

**Mr. Axworthy:** Mr. Speaker, I would only say that it is a little unseemly for a Party that has taken no position and for a Party that wants to abolish the Senate to deride a commitment on the part of western Canadians to get better and equal representation at this national level. We are prepared to put our position on paper and in public.

Does the Government endorse the basic principles of Senate reform and the objective of an equal and elected Senate? Will the Government bring forward proposals within the next 18 months so western Canadians and others in the regions will know that they can get a much better deal from Ottawa than they are getting now from this Government?

**Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister):** Mr. Speaker, I caution my hon. friend. If he is going to get into this kind of discussion which is clearly designed to exacerbate any regional difficulties which may exist, I would point out to him that since this Government came into office the unemployment rate, an important indicator of economic activity, has fallen in the following way: the lowest rate of unemployment in Canada is in Manitoba.

**Mr. Riis:** NDP Government.

**Mr. Mulroney:** The second is in Ontario, the third is in Saskatchewan, and the fourth is in Alberta. That is progress and equality brought about by fair and equal representation in the elected Cabinet of Canada, something which was lacking so often under Liberals.

**Mr. Murphy:** Alberta used to be better off.

**Mr. Mulroney:** Alberta used to be better before they got a whiff of the NDP.

**Mr. Riis:** Say that in Kilgour's riding.

**Mr. Mulroney:** When Mr. Broadbent hears that they are talking again, they will be in trouble.

**Some Hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

• (1425)

**Mr. Mulroney:** I tell you, the telephone lines are going to be humming.

I invite my hon. friend to refer to the Edmonton declaration after the 27th Annual Premiers' Conference of August 10 to August 12, which said: "The Premiers unanimously agreed that their top constitutional priority is to embark immediately upon a federal-provincial process using Quebec's five proposals as a basis for discussion to bring about Quebec's full and active participation in the Canadian federation. There was a consensus among the Premiers that then they will pursue further constitutional discussions on matters raised, which includes Senate reform."

If the matter of Senate reform is reached pursuant to this formula enunciated by the Premiers, the Government of Canada will have a proposal to put forward in regard to Senate reform.

\* \* \*

## AGRICULTURE

## INTEREST RATES AND FEES CHARGED FARMERS BY CHARTERED BANKS

**Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture, but I might point out to the Prime Minister that western agriculture is facing the worst financial crisis since R. B. Bennett was Prime Minister. That tells us something about the Prime Minister.

The Minister of Agriculture knows that many farmers have been overcharged on interest by the banks which switched from a fixed rate to a floating rate before 1982. In one case in Alberta the overcharge amounted to \$240,000. We learned just yesterday that banks are demanding a \$500 fee to show farmers their loan accounts. Will the Minister demand that the banks stop gouging farmers, repay the overcharges, give them the information they need, and straighten this matter out?

**Hon. Tom Hockin (Minister of State (Finance)):** Mr. Speaker, I would be glad to look into the allegations about whether they are charging this fee or not. I must remind the Hon. Member that I have asked the Inspector General of Banks to inquire into the scope of this program. I hope he will be getting back to me in a few weeks.

## REQUEST THAT BANKS BE OBLIGATED TO PROVIDE ACCOUNT INFORMATION TO FARMERS

**Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma):** Mr. Speaker, I talked to the Inspector General of Banks yesterday and he said their inquiry