

Oral Questions

[Translation]

STUDENT LOANS

Mr. Guy Saint-Julien (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Secretary of State.

According to the media this morning, this year Canadian taxpayers will have to pay \$390 million in interest and recovery costs to lending institutions because students failed to pay back their loans to these institutions.

• (1450)

Can the minister tell us today when the legislation will be amended with a view to making banks toe the line with respect to recovery of student loans in case of defaulting students?

Once again, Canadian taxpayers are footing the bill.

Hon. Robert de Cotret (Secretary of State of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I can inform the hon. member that negotiations with the banks are on the right track. Clearly, the student loans program needs some drastic changes. I have had talks with all the provinces in recent months, and we have now spent about 10 days negotiating with the banks to ensure that the cost to the Canadian taxpayer will be reasonable, considering the program students are being offered. We also want to ensure that students are the real beneficiaries of this program which is not the case today.

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[English]

GRAIN HANDLING

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of grains and oilseeds.

As the minister knows the grain handling system in Canada is grinding to a halt. Elevators on the west coast, in Thunder Bay, and the river ports are filling up, if they are not full, and we have a real crisis on our hands.

I would like to ask the minister what action the government is taking to ensure that our customers, primarily Russia, are able to receive our grain that they have already purchased.

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, the member exaggerates considerably when he says that the grain system is grinding to a halt.

There is no question that we have a problem in the seaway and the St. Lawrence River, but there is space in the country elevator system. The west coast ports are likely to set a record this year. In fact, the grain is moving out of the country and we have the possibility of setting an over-all record for grain movement and exports for this crop year.

With regard to the Russians, I think there were erroneous press reports around last week. There have been no lost sales to the Russians because of their lack of ability to pay freight. We have extended considerable credit to the Russians to buy our grain, in fact on a per capita basis, more than any other country except Germany.

We think our credit facilities have been very good and the results are there because, as I said, over all we have the possibility of setting a record this year for grain movement.

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary for the same minister.

The minister should know that this week, CSL scrapped two of its lake boats as a direct result of the situation that exists. He should also know that both the U.S. and the Europeans, which are pumping grain into the Commonwealth of Independent Nations like they have never been before, are outdoing us and are also subsidizing the transportation from their country to the CIS.

Will the minister act today to find a solution so that we can get the grain moving again, and instead of putting people on UI they can be there moving the grain from farm gate to port?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, again there is a serious problem on the lakes. We know that over half of the Great Lakes