

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I discussed this question of off-track elevators during the summer when I visited a great number of farm organizations and pools. I did not find a great enthusiasm for the concept except in some very special circumstances. I tried to generate some discussion of it but, generally speaking, people were more interested in branch line retention than they were interested in off-track.

The consequence of off-track elevators would be that the federal government would be invited to have a trucking assistance program and possibly after that it would be invited to contribute to the road expenditures of the provinces. With the limited money we have now, we are concentrating on the rail lines.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for telling me that this applies to special circumstances; that is precisely why I asked the question.

We realize that we need something in these frontier areas because it is the only place where young farmers can go. In light of that, will the minister enter into negotiations with the provinces, grain handling companies and the federal government to encourage some form of subsidy to get the thing rolling so that there will be some kind of a trucking subsidy in order that the very serious needs of these young farmers are taken care of?

Mr. Pepin: Madam Speaker, I presume my hon. friend has in mind the Valleyview situation. I have received a number of representations on that. As there is no railway in the area, and as a number of studies have demonstrated that it would be exceedingly expensive to build one in this area, the question of pioneer zones is now considered to be essentially a provincial responsibility. The government of Alberta has a road program to improve the situation of grain transportation in pioneer areas. The other day I had a conversation with a couple of members of the Alberta government and they seem to consider it in the same way as I do.

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HOUSING**GOVERNMENT ACTION TO INCREASE CONSTRUCTION**

Mr. Doug Lewis (Simcoe North): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. Young people today who are seeking accommodation for the first time are finding that they have virtually nowhere to go. They cannot rent apartments because none are available or the costs are too high; they cannot buy homes because the costs, including mortgage interest costs, are too high. What specific action is the government taking to increase accommodations for Canadians?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, as I have mentioned several times in the House, in the budget statement I reintroduced the MURB program at the request of provincial financial ministers and at the request of the industry itself. I might add that this was the only specific proposal which I received from that sector of the economy for inclusion in the budget. I responded to that request. At the present time I have no new programs to announce because, for one reason, I am concerned about the state of our public expenditures and the necessity of not adding further to what I consider to be a very large deficit in our public finances.

Mr. Lewis: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the same minister. We are faced with vacancy rates in St. John's, Newfoundland, of 0.1 per cent, in Toronto of 0.6 per cent, and in Vancouver of 0.4 per cent, when the industry indicates that 3 per cent across the board is the average. Surely this MURB program will not correct the situation quickly enough. Does the minister not have any other program which will do it?

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, as I stated yesterday, I was listening for suggestions from the opposition. I have no further program, but may I say—

Mr. Crosbie: You are the government.

Mr. MacEachen: —that if a large number of suggestions were made to assist housing at the present time, I doubt within the present fiscal restraint it would be possible for me, as Minister of Finance, to recommend the financing of these programs. I think the Tory party had better get its economic act together and decide whether it wants more or less spending.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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[Translation]

DISASTERS**INQUIRY RESPECTING GOVERNMENT POLICY ON AID FOR QUEBEC FLOOD VICTIMS**

Mr. J.-Roland Comtois (Terrebonne): Madam Speaker, my question is for the hon. Minister of National Defence. In view of the urgent and even disastrous situation caused by flooding all over Quebec, and especially around the Thousand Islands River, near Terrebonne, and in view of the procrastination of the Parti Québécois government and even of the Parti Québécois caucus as far as requesting assistance is concerned, is the minister considering unilateral action by the federal government to provide assistance as soon as possible to the victims of these floods in spite of the inaction of the Quebec government?

Hon. J. Gilles Lamontagne (Minister of National Defence): Madam Speaker, the question asked by the hon. member for Terrebonne is quite clear. I replied yesterday that the Canadi-