

*Oral Questions*

Or does this government oppose hydrocarbon and pipeline development in Alaska but support those despite the impact on the caribou on the Canadian side of the border?

**Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance):** Madam Speaker, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is not in the House today and I will take that as a representation and relay it to him.

• (1150)

**Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena):** Madam Speaker, what is unfortunate is that two of the ministers involved in this are sitting on the front benches.

On Monday the Liberal Party reversed its position on the \$1.5 billion fixed link from New Brunswick to Prince Edward Island and said in this House: "We want a full environmental assessment of this particular project and this particular bridge".

Will the Deputy Prime Minister now direct this project to such an assessment or will he allow construction to begin as on the Oldman River dam in Alberta and have the courts order an assessment and perhaps then a decommissioning?

**Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance):** Madam Speaker, it is true that the Liberals are changing their position on a lot of things. So are the NDP.

I noticed today that the minister of economic development in the province of Saskatchewan, who is an ardent opposer to the North American free trade agreement and the free trade agreement, went to Mexico with a group of 10 people and has gone through an immaculate conversion. He now says that North American free trade would be the greatest thing for western Canada.

There are a lot of conversions taking place and I will certainly take the hon. member's question in that context.

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**CANADA STUDENT LOANS PROGRAM**

**Mr. J. W. Bud Bird (Fredericton—York—Sunbury):** Madam Speaker, I have a question about student loans for the Secretary of State or the minister answering on her behalf.

In the February 1992 budget it was indicated that the 3 per cent administration fee on student loans could possibly be eliminated following negotiations for new arrangements with Canada's banks.

Have these negotiations now reached the stage where that surcharge of 3 per cent on student loans can in fact be eliminated?

**Hon. Gerry Weiner (Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship):** Not yet, Madam Speaker, but the discussions with the lenders are now well advanced. From what I am advised an announcement will be made on the successful conclusion of those discussions.

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**ELDER ABUSE**

**Mr. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan):** Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Seniors.

Canadians are becoming more and more aware of the problems associated with elder abuse. Despite this our government is planning cuts of over 80 per cent to the Seniors Independence Program, a program designed to combat elder abuse.

How can the minister justify these cuts at this time?

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Monique Vézina (Minister for External Relations and Minister of State (Seniors)):** Madam Speaker, our government has been very vigilant and in 1988 we initiated a strategy to deal with the needs of seniors. Through this five-year plan, we have developed all kinds of programs which must be implemented in co-operation with the organizations and seniors themselves, including those excellent programs dealing with the problem of violence against older people.

I have a document which is ready to be discussed by cabinet and we fully intend to repeat this initiative which will be based on seniors' current needs, given that these people are active and know how to take on responsibilities and share their daily experiences.

[*English*]

**Mr. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan):** Madam Speaker, the government managed to find \$21 million for its friends but the sad fact is that it can find only \$2.5 million a year to combat elder abuse. The government is simply robbing Peter to pay Paul in funding programs to fight elder abuse.