

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRESENCE IN GALLERY OF LIEUTENANT-GOVERNORS OF
MANITOBA AND SASKATCHEWAN

Mr. Speaker: Before beginning the oral question period I know hon. members would want to join with me in calling attention to the presence in our gallery this afternoon of two distinguished visitors in the persons of the two most recently nominated, and now sworn in, Lieutenant-Governors of our provinces, the first being the Hon. Jean-Paul Jobin, Lieutenant-Governor of the province of Manitoba—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker:—and the Hon. George Porteous, Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Saskatchewan.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

ITEMS OF AGENDA FOR CONFERENCE WITH PREMIERS—
PUBLIC OR PRIVATE MEETING

Mr. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I want to gallop right along.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: My question is directed to the Prime Minister. I should like to ask the Prime Minister with regard to the first ministers' meeting that is to be held in early May what items he has proposed for the agenda and whether he has in mind a private meeting at 24 Sussex Drive or whether he has suggested that at least part of the conference be open?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I do not mind if the Leader of the Opposition continues to gallop along, so long as he and his party continue to lose elections. That is fine.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Why don't you call the by-election?

Mr. Trudeau: The meeting is early in May, and the main item on the agenda will be energy pricing.

Mr. Clark: If the preamble was a challenge, we would be prepared to accept it in Ottawa-Carleton.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Clark: In light of the importance of the problems before the country, and the concern that the Prime Minister has expressed that there be a nationwide debate on these problems, I would like to ask the Prime Minister why he has not proposed following the format of last year's

Oral Questions

conference at least to the extent that the first part of the meeting is open to the public and that the agenda allow discussion on the general direction of the economy.

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, at all these conferences the agenda and the format, whether it be in camera or before camera is decided by the premiers and myself. I made a proposal to them on the pricing of oil and gas and, based on our previous experiences, I think we unanimously agreed that we were never likely to reach a decision on the appropriate price for oil and gas in front of television cameras and that even in camera it was not certain we would reach agreement but that we had a better chance there than in front of cameras. That is why I suggested this format. Of course, if the premiers reply that they want to have it in front of cameras, that would be acceptable to me.

Mr. Clark: Rather than leaving all the initiatives to the provinces, I wonder if the Prime Minister might canvass his fellow first ministers on the question of expanding both the time and the terms of reference of the meeting, and also canvass them on the possibility of holding at least part of that meeting in public.

Mr. Trudeau: I have already written to them making a suggestion to them. They usually feel pretty free to express their views, and if they want to have the media and observers present, I am sure they will indicate it.

ALLEGATION ONE PREMIER DESIRES PUBLIC MEETING—
GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): I wonder if the Prime Minister would confirm that the only decided opinion he has received from the premiers so far has been an indication from at least one that the meeting should be open to the public and perhaps even extended beyond the one day.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): I regret that I have not seen the answer from even one premier as yet. It may have arrived this morning and I will look at it. Naturally, I will be guided by the consensus which develops.

SUGGESTED EXTENSION OF THE AGENDA OF MEETING WITH
PREMIERS

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Can the Prime Minister tell us whether he has canvassed the provincial premiers to extend the meeting to include such matters as the breaking in period for the controls, constitutional reforms and many of the other pressing issues which many of the premiers would wish to discuss and hopefully wish to discuss in public?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Let me remind the House that I did suggest another meeting of first ministers to be held in mid-June at which we would be looking more at the general economic matters, particularly the fiscal arrangements, equalization plans, and so on. Naturally, it is unlikely that we will take all the time, either in early May or in mid-June, discussing just the one item. I am sure that the premiers would want to bring