

three federal cabinet ministers, in three separate executive jets, flew to Winnipeg on Friday at a cost of more than \$30,000 for fuel alone?

Mr. Epp: It's called restraint.

● (1425)

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Leader of the New Democratic Party whether he thinks it is responsible on his part to stand up in the House of Commons and say that thousands of Canadian families are losing their homes. There is enough fear about the future with respect to high interest rates without making what are totally false statements to the effect that thousands of Canadian families are losing their homes, because that is totally inaccurate.

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON USE OF AIRCRAFT

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, the minister is a past master at avoiding both his responsibilities in this House and answering any question that is put to him. He will not get away with it.

It was a cabinet document, by the way, Madam Speaker, that said up to 40,000 Canadians could lose their homes in the coming year. The minister might have read that document. I hope the minister will deal with the question, in view of the fact that the Prime Minister goes around lecturing Canadians to cut back. Will the government demonstrate that it is concerned? Is it government policy that three cabinet ministers go on three separate executive jets to the same city on a weekend? Will he answer that? Is that the policy? Will he confirm that the present cabinet has set a five-month record in using executive jets for personal travel?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased that the hon. member has rephrased his statement. Now he says instead of "are losing" their homes, they could lose their homes—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen:—under particular assumptions that have been put forward in a document. It is my intention, Madam Speaker, to do everything possible to prevent any Canadian family from losing a home because of high interest rates; that is the policy of this particular government, as stated in the Speech from the Throne.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, the hon. member asked about the use of government aircraft by ministers going to Winnipeg. I went both to Edmonton and Calgary on the weekend and I used commercial aircraft—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Oral Questions

Mr. MacEachen:—both on the way out and on the way back. I think the hon. member wants to be fair and understand the reason that ministers use government aircraft in preference to commercial aircraft. It is when scheduling problems make it impossible to use commercial aircraft. That is the policy of the government. The three ministers who went to the west left at different times and had different responsibilities and different engagements in the west; that is the reason these aircraft were taken.

PROPOSAL TO EXTEND RUNWAY IN MINISTER'S CONSTITUENCY

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact, I know that two of the ministers were going to the same meeting and for the same purpose, and could have flown in the same aircraft. Since the minister is making much of his personal virtue—and we know what a virtuous fellow he is—there was a memo dated in June requesting an extension of an aircraft runway in his own riding that would enable the minister to fly in on jet aircraft. This morning I checked to find out if that request is still active. I was told by the Department of Transport officials that that request is still active. Given his great concern for virtue here, will he assure us of two things: one, that he will withdraw that request that would cost the taxpayers some \$2 million? Second, will he lay down guidelines for the cabinet as a whole to stop wasteful spending on government travelling, cabinet ministers travelling in jets when they could be going by Air Canada or by other means which would save taxpayers' money?

● (1430)

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, at present there are guidelines in operation which were put in place by the Department of Transport. They obligate ministers not to use government aircraft when available commercial flights can be used. These guidelines are observed by ministers. In this particular case obviously commercial airlines could not be used to complete those engagements.

Mr. Broadbent: It is not obvious.

Mr. MacEachen: The hon. member referred to a newspaper comment about the extension of a runway in my constituency.

Mr. Broadbent: It is a government document; it is from the Minister of Transport.

Mr. MacEachen: Let me say that I have been travelling to my constituency for quite a long time. I have been able to do it without the use of a government jet. I intend to do it in the future, but I will not withdraw any request for an improvement to that particular airport because it is a request supported by the municipality, by the town council, and by all business leaders. I do not intend to withdraw any request, not at all.