

Oral Questions

possible and that the options proposed by the union will be examined seriously?

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for his representation. I know it is of concern to him. I can confirm that a meeting is being set up in early May, thanks to the Hon. Member's representations. This meeting will involve members of CN, members of the union, and members of my office, who will examine this situation to see whether, in fact, any alternative proposals might be advanced.

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THE ADMINISTRATION**MINISTERIAL REGIONAL OFFICES**

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Supply and Services my question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board. Will the President of the Treasury Board explain why, on the one hand, the Government is turning its back on the pensioned workers of the country while, on the other hand, it has approved six ministerial offices across the country? According to our information the B.C. office space alone will cost somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$87,000. Does he not think this is a little expensive for a regional powder-room?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, as the Hon. Member opposite well knows, it has been a long-standing practice that Ministers have been entitled to an office outside the national capital region when business warrants. That was a practice of the former Government and it is a practice of this one. In the major centres we have consolidated some of these offices.

COST OF OFFICES

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, I know that the B.C. plans, for example, include office space for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, as well as offices for two other Ministers. Is the Minister not a little bit embarrassed about the fact that the interest on the Vancouver office alone, which we conservatively estimate will cost \$250,000 a year, could permit the rental of a \$100-a-night hotel room for 250 nights out of the 365 in the year? Does he really think he needs these regional powder-rooms for Ministers from which they can expand their own political bases and their political propaganda machines, in the same way they did with the B.C. Expo tickets?

Hon. Robert de Cotret (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report to the House that through this measure no additional office space will be required. Because of this measure expenditures for the total cost of ministerial offices outside the national capital region will

actually decrease. This fits very well with our concern for better management of public funds.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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AGRICULTURE**SALE OF AMERICAN WHEAT TO ALGERIA**

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. We were all shocked this week to hear that the Americans are planning to use their massive subsidies to undercut a traditional Canadian wheat market in Syria. I find that it has already done the same thing in Algeria. Is the Minister aware that in the last six months the Americans have signed 11 separate agreements for the sale of one million tons of wheat to Algeria? In one case it sold wheat at \$103 per ton with a subsidy—if Hon. Members can believe this—of \$54.38 per ton. Is the Minister aware of this? What does he plan to do about it?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the Hon. Member that, indeed, the Minister of Agriculture is aware of this. I would say that the question should more properly be addressed to the Minister of State for the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Nystrom: He is not here.

Mr. Wise: Absolutely. He is on his way to Toronto to meet with the agriculture committee of the Canadian Bankers' Association concerning the interests of Canadian farmers. I discussed the matter with the Minister earlier this morning. Preliminary information is that that market is primarily interested in receiving Durum wheat from Canada. The program of the U.S. Government is not designated or oriented in that direction. The latest information is that we are maintaining our historic sales levels in that country.

UNITED STATES SUBSIDIES

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, since these massive subsidies have only started in the last few months does the Minister not agree that, according to the Wheat Board, they will undercut some of our traditional markets and they are a violation of the International Wheat Agreement? If he agrees, does he intend to lodge a complaint with the International Wheat Council in London?

Hon. John Wise (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, we do not have to speculate on this. The results and the impact are already there. That is recognized. It has been recognized by the Government. In fact it has been recognized in the House in questions posed earlier this week and responded to by the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister. The Minister of Finance indicated the very leading role that he took on behalf of our country at the OECD meeting. I am sure the Hon.