

Oral Questions

protect supply management in order to cut a deal with the United States in this area?

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, most emphatically, yes.

Despite persistent United States efforts to link agricultural problems, there are agricultural differences between our two countries. We reject any such linkage. We shall deal with each issue on its merits. Certainly in the case of wheat we very much share the point of view just outlined by the member opposite.

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[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORM

Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development in Quebec.

Yesterday, officials from Opération Dignité 2, an organization which promotes regional economic development, appealed to the government for help. They are asking the government to postpone the UI reform for one year, as it will severely affect regions with a high proportion of seasonal workers, in Quebec as well as in other provinces.

Given the disastrous impact of this reform on the economy of predominantly rural regions, will the minister pledge to delay for one year the UI cuts announced in the budget, and actually do it?

• (1445)

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, it is precisely because we are very much aware of the enormous problem which unemployment represents everywhere in Canada, and certainly in rural areas, that we want to proceed with a reform of the unemployment insurance program. We want to really lower UI contributions so that small businesses can hire new workers, protect the poor, including single-parent families, and have the money to educate and train the workers of the future.

We made those decisions because we are keenly aware of the unemployment problem in Quebec and in rural Canada.

Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane): My supplementary is for the Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development in Quebec.

Is the minister prepared to come and sit down—and not merely go through the area like he did during the election campaign—with residents of the Gaspé Peninsula and Lower St. Lawrence region to find, with them and with provincial offi-

cials, ways to make better use of current income security funds and create real jobs?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): In the context of the social security reform undertaken by my colleague, I will certainly do so. However, I will not be the only one; other ministers are willing to go too. Nevertheless, as I have already said, I can tell you unequivocally that I am quite prepared to go and meet your constituents this summer.

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[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Jim Jordan (Leeds—Grenville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for housing.

The budget announcement that \$100 million over the next two years will be available to improve the housing of low income Canadians is being well received, particularly in rural Canada. Reinstating RRAP will create jobs and improve living conditions for low income Canadians.

Could the minister advise the House when the funds will be made available? What interest has there been from the provinces and territories to become partners in this program?

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his unexpected question.

We have had numerous deliberations with the provincial governments across the country. A number of them have agreed with us that there is a necessity for cutting out duplication and overlap. However a number of them for a variety of reasons have not wanted to proceed with us. For instance, in the province of Ontario there has been no sharing of that common vision.

Moneys under RRAP will be made available later this week. Applications can be processed in the coming weeks. I hope we will be able to have a fair amount of money in the system in order to provide the necessary repairs for the homes in need.

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GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister admitted that the gravy train is already at the station picking up loyal Liberals for well paid government jobs. It appears this government is prepared to pay a premium to get the gravy train to stop at Liberal advertising and polling stations. It is my understanding cabinet is considering guidelines to grant government contracts to Liberals even if their fees are 10 per cent higher than non-Liberal competitors.