

Oral Questions

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence): Sir, I recognize that we have a newcomer into the field of the arts.

Mr. Chrétien: A very successful one.

Mr. Nielsen: I say that "from the heart" to the hon. gentleman. I can assure him that the answer to his question is plain. I have read it and re-read it for the benefit of his more simple-minded colleague. I am sure that he will better understand it given his artistic and discerning talents.

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FINANCE**REPORTED SYNCRUDE TAX REMISSIONS**

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. Last week we learned from the Auditor General that Dome Petroleum gained about \$1 billion at the expense of other taxpayers in the form of a tax remission. While the Minister has been trying to make up his mind on whether Canadians should be informed about such tax remissions on a regular basis, I have learned that Syncrude has also benefited from tax remissions to the extent of hundreds of millions of dollars. Will the Minister confirm that so far Syncrude has in fact gained upwards of about \$200 million in tax remissions?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I will correct what the Hon. Member said in his preamble because, although I am sure not purposely, he has misled the House. He said that Dome Petroleum has gained. If I may remind him, Dome Petroleum would have gone bankrupt had this remission order not been given. Therefore, it is not that Dome Petroleum has gained, it is that the Government has gained by allowing Dome some relief in order that it can stay in business, keep people employed, keep the energy service industry alive and active in western Canada and continue to provide tax dollars to the Government. Therefore, the Government has gained from that remission order.

In relation to the Syncrude order that he spoke about, I will have to clarify the details before responding to that question.

REQUEST FOR REGULAR PUBLICATION OF TAX REMISSION ORDERS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I hope the Minister will look into it. It is our caculation that Syncrude has gained up to \$200 million so far. This particular remission goes on until the year 2003 and the net cost to other Canadian taxpayers will be in the neighbourhood of \$1 billion. Therefore, does the Minister not think it entirely appropriate to decide now that information on such costs to taxpayers who foot the bill ought to be made available on a regular basis to those taxpayers?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, as I said, I do want to clarify my understanding and recollection of what the Hon. Member has raised before I comment on it. My immediate response would be that he is excessive in the numbers he has used but I will not comment further without clarifying them myself.

● (1425)

I have said in response to his question last week that I would consider that, and I am carefully considering it now. There are certain aspects of confidentiality as it relates to individuals who receive the benefit of tax remission orders. As I indicated yesterday, there are hundreds of these during the course of the year. I want to clarify that before I make a decision.

TAXPAYERS' RIGHT TO KNOW

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Government in its wisdom has now increased taxes for ordinary taxpayers across the country to the extent of hundreds of dollars and up to a thousand dollars per average family. When taxpayers are paying the bill, as they would in tax allocations and tax benefits to Dome and Syncrude, will the Minister tell us why he must consider this any longer? Why can he not make a commitment to taxpayers of Canada now that when they are paying the bill they have a right to know who is getting that money?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this is about the fourth or fifth time that I have responded to this question. I think the people of Canada would not want me to make a snap judgment on the floor of the House of Commons but to consider the implications of this, which is something that is quite far-reaching in relation to past practice. I want to consider it carefully before making a judgment.

Let me remind the Hon. Member that we are in no way hesitant to take action where action is needed. We cut out the SRTCs. We cut out limited partnerships where it was inappropriate. We cut out carve-outs, and we cut out income splitting. We put on a surtax for upper-income Canadians and we will establish a minimum tax effective January 1. That is action for which I think the Hon. Member should be applauding us.

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CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION**SIZE OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Acting Minister of Communications. Yesterday the Secretary of State for External Affairs indicated that his Government plans to protect our cultural institutions, if not our cultural industries. Last night we heard a cry from the heart from Mr. Juneau, the man after whom we named our Canadian music awards. He says that our Canadian culture, through our national instrument of the CBC, will be destroyed if the Government proceeds with its savaging cuts