

Oral Questions

Mr. Gillespie: Mr. Speaker, I made it very clear a moment ago that this was a commercial transaction, that it was financed by the private banking system and that no taxpayers' money was involved. Therefore, there was no demand in any way upon the financial resources of the Government of Canada.

Mr. Stanfield: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to re-read the question I asked him three days ago, and whether he can say in his heart that he honestly and openly answered it as he has today.

Mr. Gillespie: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member to re-read that question too, and also, when he uses the words "express guarantees", whether he means express guarantees. Clearly, that was the phrase he used and I answered him in exactly the same way. I dealt with that in my answer yesterday. The hon. member cannot have it both ways.

PETRO-CANADA PURCHASE OF PACIFIC PETROLEUMS SHARES—
CONTINGENT LIABILITY OF GOVERNMENT

Mr. Harvie Andre (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. Could the minister explain to the House how he rationalizes his admission now, after three days, that there is a contingent liability on the Crown in regard to transactions of Petro-Canada, but that it in no way represents a demand upon the resources of the Government of Canada?

Hon. Alastair Gillespie (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I think that anyone with any experience at all would understand that answer.

Mr. Andre: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the minister go back to school.

My supplementary question is to the President of the Treasury Board. The 1978 capital budget for Petro-Canada was approved by cabinet on June 16, 1978, and the Privy Council document was tabled on October 10. This capital budget calls for common share issues of 205 million and preferred share issues of about 270 million. Since the Petro-Canada act clearly establishes that only the Crown can purchase common or preferred shares which must be purchased from consolidated revenue—meaning, therefore, that the costs involved must appear in government estimates of spending programs—can the President of the Treasury Board tell the House why this commitment on the part of cabinet has not appeared in either the main estimates or the supplementary estimates since approval was given back in June?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, I would like to examine that question. Is the hon. member referring to approval of this current acquisition?

Mr. Andre: The issue of shares in this capital budget.

[Mr. Stanfield.]

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, I will examine the question and I will be very careful in my examination before I give the hon. member an answer. I will give him an answer tomorrow.

Mr. Stevens: You approved it.

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[Translation]

TRANSPORT

FARE INCREASES FOR CNR SUBURBAN PASSENGERS—
GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. In view of the decision of the Canadian National to increase its 1979 rates for users of suburban trains by about 50 per cent, I believe, can the minister tell us whether discussions are being pursued with the Quebec government in this regard?

[English]

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport and Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I have not had personal discussions with the minister with regard to this matter. We are in touch with the province of Quebec, of course, at the official level concerning the use of urban transportation assistance program funds. Assistance to commuter travel, as well as other forms of urban assistance, would come under that program. The province of Quebec knows that we are prepared to consider their designation of federal funds for such purposes.

[Translation]

Mr. La Salle: Mr. Speaker, on a supplementary. As the minister confirms that discussions are going on with officials, and as such a high increase is almost inconceivable for commuters, can the minister agree before this House to urge the Canadian National to put off application of its decision until such time as the matter has been settled between the two levels of government?

[English]

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, some time ago studies were begun in the province of Quebec concerning the level of fares and level of service on commuter lines. It was our position then, as it has long been, that commuter service is the principal responsibility of either the municipal or provincial governments. At the time the studies were undertaken, in order to allow time for their completion I did ask Canadian National to delay a certain fare increase. However, at that time I indicated that it was associated specifically with the need to complete the studies.

Subsequently, the province of Quebec undertook of its own responsibility to make some payments to Canadian National in order to avoid fare increases. I believe the fundamental responsibility must be seen to rest clearly on the municipal government and the provincial government with regard to this