

Oral Questions

Can he tell us when the government is going to stop what amounts to a fairly cruel joke on the fishermen and plant workers who have been waiting much too long for this? Can he tell us if the package is ready or when it will be ready? Is it not true that it is sitting there just waiting for the return of the Minister for International Trade so he can get his picture in the paper and have his photo opportunity? Is that all that is hanging it up at the moment?

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, what the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister for International Trade have been doing is engaging in consultations with leaders of the fishing industry, the unions, and the provincial governments that are involved to ensure that when we bring forward a package, which we hope to do fairly shortly, it will not only be an effective federal response, but it will be a position that is able to take advantage of the real interests and the jurisdictions of provincial governments which are interested in the matter.

While I am in such a forthcoming mood, Mr. Speaker, perhaps in relation to a question that was put to me by the member for Gander—Grand Falls the other day, I could quote from a letter I received from Mr. Bill Berry, the president of a—

Some Hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): —fishing company in Newfoundland, who said: “Last night I caught your response on Soviet fishing—”

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): “—in Canadian waters in the House of Commons. We are a Newfoundland company doing large business with the East Bloc, especially the U.S.S.R. They are good business partners. I am—”

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the Minister could send a copy of the letter across the aisle.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture who said the details of the \$1 billion worth of direct farm aid to grain producers in Canada would be available before Easter.

Since this is the last opportunity to inform the House, can the minister give details of the program so that farmers and bankers can know specifically how the payment will be made, what it will be based on, when the cheques can be received at the farm, and approximately what each farmer will receive?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows the federal government announced its intention to provide assistance to meet the shortfall in income that has been experienced by farmers in the projected year 1990. We are engaged in discussions with the provinces at the present time. I personally met with the premier of the province of Saskatchewan. They are looking at some proposals. We have had discussions as well with the provinces of Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba at the officials level. We consider this to be a very top priority.

I say to the hon. member from Nova Scotia, she will be pleased to know that meetings are either taking place today or tomorrow with respect to the fur industry on behalf of which she has made many representations, and I thank her for that. I can advise the hon. member that this is a top priority. We are working very hard on developing packages that will be adaptable to each of the respective provinces to meet that multi-dimensional need.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, since the purpose of this program is to offset programs being offered by the Americans and the Europeans, who make their support programs available through their central governments, why did this government decide to shift the focus on to the provinces instead of directly approaching the problem and providing assistance directly to farmers?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is suggesting that we should have provided \$140 million such as the United States has provided in the current EEP program, the Export Enhancement Program, I would certainly take that as a representation. But we thought that the need was far more serious than that and we have offered up \$500 million.