

Oral Questions

Mr. Gray: Mr. Speaker, it is surprising, in view of the seriousness of the matter, that a government which is committed to open government does not have a current estimate right now which it could give to the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Gray: In view of the government's policy of moving domestic interest rates almost in tandem with the American rates to record high levels, and in view of the professed desire of the government to see domestic oil prices rise quickly to world levels, are not the acting minister and his government in fact telling the Canadian people that their policy is to have this country move into a recession?

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that that is certainly not the government's policy. I would draw to the hon. member's attention, since he has referred to the American situation so much today, what noted economists in the country have been saying. For example, last week an article stated that the Canadian government announced plans to encourage the development of a free market economy and to reduce the role of the public sector, and it went on to say that that policy boded well for the long-term prospects of the Canadian economy.

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ENERGY**OIL PRICES—REQUEST GOVERNMENT ABANDON PLANS FOR FURTHER INCREASES**

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. Since, even at present rates, home owners with a \$40,000 mortgage negotiated three to five years ago will have to pay, under the present rate, approximately \$1,022 more a year, and since the government is pressing ahead with the largest increase in oil prices in our history at a time when multinational oil companies are registering record profits, will the minister agree to abandon his plan for oil price increases equivalent to an additional tax of up to \$200 a year on every home owner and car driver in this country?

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I have mentioned on previous occasions the fact that any speculation on the part of the hon. member or anyone else with respect to any price increase is premature. In those terms, I would ask the hon. member to consider the implications of merely standing pat or doing a flip-flop with respect to energy policy, as his party has done.

I also want to point out that in our considerations of the implications of price increases we are concerned about the economic consequences. We in this government want to make sure that measures are put in place which will, in fact, in the event of an increase, address these particular problems.

Mr. Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, if the minister had done his homework and read up on the previous government, he would

[Mr. Stevens.]

have seen that we had a policy which took care of the average Canadian consumer and the average Canadian citizen.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lalonde: If the minister will not act to protect the consumer and prevent the price of home heating oil reaching unconscionable levels, will he at least set up immediately the energy supply allocation board provided for by the Energy Supply Emergency Act passed by the previous Parliament, especially since his provincial colleagues in Calgary yesterday concluded that in view of the inaction of this government, they themselves would set up a purely interprovincial advisory committee on energy? Will he set up that board right now?

● (1420)

Mr. Hnatyshyn: Mr. Speaker, I simply reject out of hand any suggestion made with respect to the premise of that question. The fact is, and the hon. member knows, that my department has been working very hard in close co-operation with the provinces with respect to the Emergency Supplies Allocation Act and the background and support apparatus that may be required in the event of an emergency, real or apprehended.

The fact is that we are working hard. We have in our department taken the kind of support positions that will be available to us in the event of an emergency. I do not think it sits well with the hon. member to make accusations of the sort he has, because they are simply not true.

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FINANCE, TRADE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**INTEREST RATES—ORDER OF APPEARANCE OF WITNESSES BEFORE HOUSE COMMITTEE**

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I cannot understand the Liberals complaining about the government carrying out their policies; but that is another matter.

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Broadbent: I should like to ask the Prime Minister a question about this important matter of interest rates that concerns every Canadian.

As the Standing Committee on Finance, Trade and Economic Affairs is planning to hear both the governor of the Bank of Canada and the Minister of Finance, will the Prime Minister reverse the decision forced upon two of his backbenchers by the Minister of Finance last night when he instructed them to support a motion that would have the governor of the Bank of Canada appear before that committee ahead of the Minister of Finance, when it should be the Minister of Finance who is there first to state government policy?