

S. O. 31

WINTER OLYMPICS

Ms. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance may well have to revise his budget forecast to take account of the bounty of precious metals that Canadians are bringing home from Norway.

Isabelle Brasseur and Lloyd Eisler turned in an astounding performance in pairs figure skating last night to earn a bronze medal for Canada.

[*Translation*]

First to "break the ice", these two young athletes have put on a performance worthy of the greatest skaters of our times. They displayed an exemplary calm and a strong determination. Isabelle and Lloyd deserve our recognition and our admiration.

This morning, Canadians had another reason to be proud. Jean-Luc Brassard, from Grande-Île, Quebec, took the honours, winning for Canada the gold medal in the free-style moguls competition. The Canadian team had much hope for this young 21 year-old athlete. He took up the challenge with unrivalled talent and command.

• (1410)

[*English*]

I join the Minister of Canadian Heritage and all Canadians in congratulating the latest crop of Canadian Olympic medal winners.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. John Loney (Edmonton North): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to bring to the attention of the House that the composite leading index rose by .08 in January, matching its revised growth rate for December. It is noteworthy that these gains are the highest since the index began its recovery in 1991.

An upward trend in the index points to better economic times ahead. Most economists expect stronger growth in 1994.

Statistics Canada reported that the leading indicator is heading in the right direction. The acceleration in recent months has been the result principally of a continental upturn and the buoyancy in the stock markets.

Manufacturing demands have been steady. New orders recorded a third straight increase despite the effect of temporary plant closings in the auto industry. At the same time, shipments to stocks ratio continue to improve, rising to the highest level since the data series began in early 1952.

The stockmarket soared to new all time records in January, accelerating from 1.6 per cent growth to 2.1 per cent growth at a time of falling interest rates.

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Guy H. Arseneault (Restigouche—Chaleur): Mr. Speaker, over the last years, Canadians living in rural areas have been badly hurt by the closure or the reduction in services of thousands of rural post offices.

When he took office, the minister declared a moratorium which has been extended and is still in force.

[*English*]

The closures of rural post offices were a blatant attack on rural Canada. I would like to congratulate the minister for the leadership he has shown on the issue. This moratorium is an important first step.

[*Translation*]

I urge the minister to direct Canada Post Corporation to immediately drop its policy with respect to the closure of rural post offices. It is time to rectify that flagrant mistake for the sake of the rural areas of our country.

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REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bernard Deshaies (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, regional economic recovery is an absolute priority for all Quebecers and Canadians.

I would like to mention two cases in my region of Abitibi, where companies are acting responsibly in this regard. They are Forpan and Agnico Eagle, in Val-d'Or. Forpan will invest \$8.3 million to increase the capacity of its particle board plant by 25 per cent. Through this investment, the company will increase its competitiveness on the international market and preserve jobs in the region.

Agnico Eagle will invest \$13 million and provide jobs for some 40 workers during the next two years in mining exploration.

These are two concrete examples of economic recovery activities undertaken by energetic entrepreneurs capitalizing on the region's potential.

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[*English*]

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PLANS

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod): Mr. Speaker, our nation was founded and has prospered on such principles as hard work and self-reliance. Traditionally we have rewarded men and women who start and maintain small businesses by their sweat and sacrifice.

Now our finance minister awash in debt from years of government overspending is talking of removing another small business privilege, the ability to put aside one's own resources to finance one's retirement.