

Oral Questions

expanding and enhancing immigration offices in the riding of the Minister of Finance?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member is quoting from a document. As I indicated, the reconfiguration of Immigration Canada offices across the country relate to the amendments we brought to the Immigration Act. This reconfiguration will not deprive any regions of Canada of the services they should expect from Immigration Canada. Therefore, there is no point in the hon. member continuing that tempest. It is not true.

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NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister of trade. This government has always said that the NAFTA, the Canada-U.S.-Mexico trade deal would not have a negative effect on the environment and would be good for workers. In fact, over the past year when I questioned the minister on what he intends to do in terms of taking concerns about the environment forward in the trade deal talks and concerns for workers, the minister replied that this is a commercial deal and has nothing to do with these other issues. Yet the government has now acknowledged that it would be prepared to participate in parallel or further agreements at the suggestion of President Clinton.

I would like to ask the minister of trade why NAFTA was good enough for workers and the environment last December, but now just two months later the government says it will negotiate new agreements. Is it admitting that NAFTA is a failure and has huge problems?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I know I am never going to be able to convince my friend because on this particular issue she has blinkers on. The point is tremendous opportunities are opened up under the NAFTA in giving access to the Mexican markets, one of the fastest growing economies in the Americas, a market with a middle-income market of 25 million or 30 million people, a market where

companies are already taking advantage of the opportunities with new contracts there.

My hon. friend is right. I have said it is a good deal and I continue to say it is a good deal. But we have also tried to inject some provisions through these side agreements on labour and the environment as we started last February, a full year ago. We will continue to do that. We will be participating with the other two countries in order to achieve that. Those negotiations will probably be starting in two or three weeks.

Hon. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, a supplementary to the minister. While the government clearly is about to bring legislation before this House to implement the North American trade deal, on March 15 as the minister has just said, Canada, Mexico and the U.S. are scheduled to begin negotiating these so-called side agreements or parallel agreements on the environment and workers that the minister formerly said were not necessary.

My question to the minister is this: Given that there will be parallel agreements negotiated and discussed, why is the minister persisting in bringing forward legislation which is clearly not complete without these agreements and why does the minister not simply withdraw this legislation until that process is complete?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the legislation is complete because it reflects the agreement that was signed by all three countries last December. It is important for us to allay any uncertainty to the private sector. We have to deal with the agreement, to get the agreement legislated and get it behind us. That does not say we cannot engage in the discussions on the side agreements on labour and the environment, if we can have some other elements where we can work in a co-operative way to improve labour arrangements or environmental conditions in the three countries.

I would say to my hon. friend that the United States is already into its legislative process; Canada will be starting on its legislative process imminently and Mexico will be starting as soon as it comes back from its winter break which will be April 1.