

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre):** The hon. member says "don't I know". We just started the discussions with the provinces within the past couple of weeks. That arose out of a decision taken at the finance ministers' meeting in December, so we have been moving fairly quickly in order to try and identify ways that we can work together and minimize this compliance burden. As we minimize the compliance burden we will be saving costs both for the business community as well as for governments in general.

• (1420)

**Mr. Douglas Young (Gloucester):** Mr. Speaker, as we discussed in this House, the minister and other members of the government have indicated that Canadians do not understand the goods and services tax. I think that is becoming obvious because opposition continues to increase to the goods and services tax, although the rate has been lowered in the latest proposal of the government.

Does he not understand that after all of the effort that has been made by the government to try to convince Canadians to accept the goods and services taxes, he has failed and that a basic tenet of the parliamentary system is that you need to have acceptance on the part of the people for these kinds of onerous tax measures?

I want to ask the finance minister if he is prepared to undertake again today, as he did on Friday, that he is personally prepared to travel—I understand he cannot go to every nook and cranny of the country—at least to four or five major centres in this country where he can explain to Canadians what the goods and services tax is all about and to allow for conflicting views to be heard? Is the minister prepared to sell what the chairman of the finance committee has not been able to sell, and that no one sitting next to him or behind him is prepared to even discuss in public?

**Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member mentioned a number of things during the course of that lengthy preamble to his question. First of all, I have made a number of trips to different parts of the country and I intend to do this on an ongoing basis. This, I believe, is part of my responsibility as Minister of Finance. Other colleagues on this side of the House will be doing exactly that as well.

The hon. member could assist the effort to improve the understanding of Canadians by not distorting what the GST does. He has just called it an onerous tax. It is a very simple tax in relation to the existing federal sales tax which was brought in some 65 years ago.

We will have a one-page tax return so that businesses will be able to pay their tax based on calculations put on one page. That demonstrates the ongoing commitment that we have to the small business community, a commitment that is clearly characterized by specific actions, including the \$500,000 capital gains exemption, and the refundability of research and development credits for those small businesses which are not in a profitable position at the point that they undertake that research and development effort.

We have reduced the tax rate on corporate income tax for small businesses, and in a number of ways over the course of the last five years we have clearly demonstrated a commitment to and understanding of the position that small business is in. We have done things in order to try to assist their ability to work to create jobs to generate wealth for this country.

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**MINE CLOSINGS**

**Mr. Maurice Foster (Algoma):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Last Friday Rio Algom Mines in Elliot Lake announced it will be shutting down two of its mines, laying off some 1,600 workers. This represents some 70 per cent of the workforce of this company and is a devastating blow for the community. I wonder if the minister can tell the House, those families and the community of Elliot Lake what action the government is specifically prepared to take to assist them in this devastating news. We are not only talking about the 1,600 miners here but we are talking about thousands of people in the community, their livelihoods, their families and their homes. They are all involved in this devastating news. I wonder if the minister could tell us what specific action the government is prepared to take.

**Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, I realize that the closure of this mine, which has been a primary source of income and employment in that area, one which I have visited, is quite a blow to the community. Our Industrial Adjustment Services are already working with the company, with the United Steelworkers and with the province to try to determine what programs will work the best. This