

Oral Questions

through the Farm Credit Corporation, that there is a record number of bankruptcies among the farm community, how can the Minister stand there and say the funds are not exhausted when the funds are not available at the farm level? Would the Minister tell us whether or not there is going to be a continuation of loaning power by the Farm Credit Corporation throughout the remaining half of this year equal to that of the average of the previous two or three years?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, let me outline the amount of money that would be loaned by the Farm Credit Corporation, that Crown corporation which is the eleventh largest lender in Canada. I really appreciate the support we are getting from the Tory Party for a Crown corporation because I had another Crown corporation I was supporting in this House and I got condemned for it. They seem to have forgotten that there are ten other corporations, private corporations, that lend money in this country, and they have far more funds than the Farm Credit Corporation. We are taking over their responsibility from them in the lending field—

Mr. Malone: Answer the question.

Mr. Whelan:—because 56 per cent of our loans this year are taking over the loans which the private institutions made to farmers, whereas normally it is 17 per cent of our loans. This will be the largest lending year we have ever had for the Farm Credit Corporation in Canada.

If the Hon. Member wants to make representations, I suggest that he go to the Treasury branches in Alberta—another Crown corporation that lends money to farmers in his own Province—to see if he can raise more money there. He could go to the private banks and see if he can get more money from the private banks in Alberta, to loan to the farmers. Alberta has had one of the biggest years ever with the Farm Credit Corporation this year. If he wants to check the facts he will find that is so and he will find out that we are doing a pretty good job.

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CONSUMER AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS**PRICE OF GASOLINE—ATTACK BY MAJOR OIL COMPANIES ON SMALL FIRMS**

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. It follows in light of the announcement of the Restrictive Trade Practices Commission that Imperial Oil has once again ripped the consumers in this country from stem to stern in using Suny Oil as a fighting brand to fight gas wars almost by proxy. Imperial Oil was also one of the major players in the \$12 billion rip-off of Canadian consumers as shown in the revelations in the Bertrand Report.

Would the Minister be prepared to call the heads of the major oil companies in Canada to her office to extract some concessions from them? One of them would be that there be no

more targeting independent oil companies in an attempt basically to discipline and destroy them, and that she seek from those oil companies an immediate roll back in the retail price of gasoline, which is far too high.

Hon. Judy Erola (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, in my reply the other day in the House—the Hon. Member could not have been in the House or he would not be asking the question—I indicated that there is an inquiry under way and that it would be premature of me to make any suggestions as to what measures should be taken until that inquiry is completed. I do agree with the Hon. Member. We are, as consumers, very much concerned about the price of gasoline. Let me assure him that the moment we have the results of that inquiry we will let him know and take the appropriate measures.

REQUEST FOR PROTECTION OF INDEPENDENT FIRMS

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Mr. Speaker, the Minister's answer is totally inappropriate. The terms of reference of that inquiry do not pertain to the present situation. During these recent gas wars there has been a definite attempt by the major oil companies to drive independents out of business. There is no doubt they have fought those battles on a regional basis, having consumers pay high prices in one area, and subsidized gas wars to discipline and remove independents in other areas. What action is the Minister going to take to protect independents and ensure that consumers get a fair price on gasoline before they are gone? I think the Minister should be prepared to acknowledge in this House that by the time—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member has asked his supplementary. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

Hon. Judy Erola (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the Hon. Member that we are as concerned as he is. That is the reason the inquiry was launched. I do assure the Hon. Member that those matters to which he referred are very much within the purview of the present inquiry. We are again, I repeat, very much concerned, and we will take the appropriate measures if and when the inquiry indicates that those measures are required.

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AGRICULTURE**WESTERN GRAIN STABILIZATION PROGRAM**

Mr. Len Gustafson (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct my question to the Minister of Agriculture. Under the Western Grain Stabilization Program will a payment be made to farmers, will it be made before the end of the year, and what will be the amount of that payment?