

Off the ice and out of the rink, during the day and well into the night, I invite and encourage everyone to get involved in the nine fun-filled days in Brandon, the button of world curling.

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LIBERAL PARTY

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it was quite a sight yesterday to see the Liberal cheerleaders celebrating the Prime Minister's 32nd anniversary as a member of Parliament. Imagine our surprise when we learned that the Prime Minister was elected on April 8, 1963, not April 4, and that he has been an MP for 28 years, not 32.

I guess the health minister was too busy trying to protect her own job to check the facts. Actually, it comes as no shock to Reformers that the Liberals have such trouble with numbers. After all, this is the same party that gave us a massive deficit, a huge public debt and out of control government spending.

The Prime Minister shrugged off the mistake, saying what is four days among friends and that there is not much difference between 28 and 32 years. Numbers are important and I have a few that this government should take note of.

The national debt is \$548 billion. The federal government spends nine times as much on debt payments as it does on education and five times as much as on health. The national unemployment rate is 9.6 per cent and 1.5 million people in this country are unemployed.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[Translation]

FISHERIES

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to claim that the agreement in principle reached by Canada and the European Union will soon lead to a genuine agreement. However, Spain and Portugal have rejected the very terms of the agreement in principle.

My question is directed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. Could the minister report on the status of negotiations between Canada and the European Union and tell us whether the problem is still the introduction of enforcement and conservation mechanisms?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has spoken to the president of the EU commission. Negotiators are meeting again today, and conservation of the resource is a priority. Our main

Oral Questions

objective is to obtain an agreement with teeth on conservation and enforcement.

[English]

Canada remains committed to an effective conservation regime. I can say to the Leader of the Opposition that we have negotiated in detail what we consider to be an effective enforcement and conservation regime. What we are waiting on now, as the opposition leader will know, is for the rather complex and difficult and may I say time-consuming workings and mechanics of the European Union to conclude the process at that end.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Leader of the Opposition, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think we all support the efforts of the government and the minister, who by the way has done a very good job, to provide partners in the fisheries, the various countries that are part of this operation, with a vigorous enforcement mechanism to preserve the resource.

However, that being said, what reason does the minister have to be optimistic that he will manage to get this kind of result, when two member countries of the European Union, Spain and Portugal, who happen to be the main parties concerned, have rejected the very terms of the draft agreement?

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has noted before and notes again today the clear support of the Bloc Québécois and the Leader of the Opposition for the position the government has taken.

The Leader of the Opposition gave advice to the government some time ago. He said it would take a mixture of firm resolve, firm action and diplomacy to bring about a successful conclusion to this dispute. That is precisely the manner in which the government is approaching this problem.

I would say to the Leader of the Opposition that Canada is negotiating bilaterally with the European Union. The bilateral negotiation with the European Union has shown great progress. It is not yet complete but progress is made every day. A detailed text is now on the table. Frankly it is a matter for the European Union to ensure that each of the member states complies with all the clauses contained in the draft agreement.

• (1420)

For the moment we still do not have the formal acceptance of the European Union of the draft agreement.

I can tell the Leader of the Opposition that the negotiators by and large have finished their work and have put forward a joint draft text. It is a text that meets the objectives of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We expect the European Union to do as we shall do, embrace it with both arms.