

Oral Questions

when we are trying to diversify our economy in western Canada?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has made a very astute observation about the importance of the change from the existing sales tax to the proposed sales tax. There is no question, and there is widespread agreement that the existing tax is a bad tax, that it does hinder industry. It does hinder the diversification of industry and, as the hon. member has pointed out, it does so in western Canada and in his own riding of Elk Island.

What the new tax does do is remove all tax on inventory almost as soon as it is paid so that the taxpayers are now able to carry inventory free of the burden of sales tax. That is different from the existing tax where the sales tax is paid immediately by the individual company and that tax is carried right until the final sale is made by that company of its product. So there is a very major improvement in the operations of the sales tax system.

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UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Employment. My riding is in the highest unemployment zone in Canada and it is primarily in the north, a fishing constituency.

In answering questions from the member for Labrador, the Minister of Employment either did not understand the nature of the questions being put by my friend or, more frightening, may have understood and chose to answer the way she did in any case.

I make a plea to the minister on behalf of the people in northern Newfoundland and in rural Newfoundland who have had three successive failures in the fishery. That fact can be substantiated by the Minister of Fisheries. It can be substantiated by many members who represent fishing constituencies throughout Atlantic Canada.

Does the minister realize that the regulations this year for qualifications under the special response program in fact say to fishermen that if you have had two disastrous years in a row, you do not qualify. The bottom line says to

fishermen if you, as a result of natural consequences, not your fault, have two bad years in a row, the Government of Canada no longer considers you a fisherman. Sell your boat, destroy your gear, go on welfare or go into a forced resettlement program somewhere else in this country. Will the minister take a look at that program, for God's sake, and help people maintain a traditional way of life.

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had read the announcement, he would see that we announced that there are specific criteria to determine who qualifies. The criteria are intended to provide assistance to *bona fide* fishing industry workers. Individuals unable to receive these special benefits but with proven attachment to the fishing industry will be able to request a review. We are doing everything we can to be flexible for the people with an attachment to the fishing industry.

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely the point. Does a farmer stop being a *bona fide* farmer because he has had two bad years in a row for reasons that have nothing to do with the farmer? No. The Government of Canada rightly assists the farmer and we applaud that. We are asking for the same consideration for fishermen.

The current rules say to a fisherman who had a disaster last year and a disaster again this year, you are no longer a fisherman, we cannot help you. I am saying, if you do not change those rules, you will force the resettlement of thousands of fishermen out of rural Canada.

Mr. Speaker: That is more of a statement than a question. The minister may want to rise.

Mrs. McDougall: Mr. Speaker, we have been in constant touch with the provincial fishing industry and fishermen in Newfoundland. We have been helping people in the fishing industry every year when there has been a special need and we will continue to do so. I do not think that shouting around this Chamber is going to help them a whole lot either.

• (1500)

Mr. Speaker: I will take a single question from the hon. member for Brant and a single question from the hon. member for Gloucester.