

Oral Questions

Mr. Blais: It is a provincial matter.

Mr. Edmonston: —when the federal government will stop abandoning responsibility for its jurisdiction by saying that it is still up to the provincial government. It is a matter of joint jurisdiction, Mr. Speaker, which is obvious from the fire control regulations. When will we see real leadership from this government, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Secretary of State of Canada and Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship)): Mr. Speaker, we responded immediately when the Government of Quebec, which is responsible for coordinating emergency measures, called us. We responded immediately.

As I said, we are on the scene, we are coordinating federal activities and I can assure you that we have implemented measures to coordinate all federal activity involving Health and Welfare, Agriculture Canada, Emergency Preparedness Canada and National Defence forces that are already there.

• (1440)

Mr. Phillip Edmonston (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers and Canadians would rather see prevention and leadership on the part of the federal government, something it has not shown so far. It dawdles and talks endlessly instead of showing leadership, and we are sick of it. My question is this, and I want a straightforward answer: When will we see some leadership? What are you going to do to prevent this problem? Not only in my riding, in the city of Saint-Amable, but throughout Canada, because there are hundreds of places like this, including Hagersville, and you know it.

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Secretary of State of Canada and Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship)): Mr. Speaker, I clearly said that a task force was set up by the Council of Canadian Environment Ministers on March 20, 1990. This task force is collecting all the information and will have the opportunity to analyze it at the beginning of July. At the moment, ensuring public safety is paramount and that is what we are doing.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Jim Peterson (Willowdale): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. On March 4,

1987, the Prime Minister said: "We must make our manufacturing sector more competitive." Mr. Speaker, this year, because of this government's policies, we have lost 71,000 manufacturing jobs.

An hon. member: Shame!

Mr. Peterson: Today, the Minister of Finance increased once again our prime rate which is now 5.6 points higher than the American rate.

An hon. member: Shame!

Mr. Peterson: How can we compete with the Americans when we are at such a disadvantage? When will this government stop listening to its Minister of Finance and start listening to Canadian manufacturers?

[*English*]

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, as recently as last week, or two weeks ago, the International Monetary Fund complimented Canada on its economic policies. This was following compliments by the OECD, following compliments by the World Economic Forum and following evidence over the last five years of a growth rate in Canada unequalled in the rest of the world.

The hon. member is worried about our competitiveness figures. I have the latest statement of Canadian international trade for the month of March showing that exports, for example, of automotive products registered the largest growth in March, increasing by more than \$600 million compared to February. Over all, Canada's trade balance in March posted a \$471 million surplus and was up \$418 million in February. We are not doing that badly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jim Peterson (Willowdale): Mr. Speaker, if we are doing so well, why have we lost 71,000 vital, key manufacturing jobs in four months?

We have seen the collapse today of another Canadian firm, one of Canada's largest real estate firms, with a loss of 300 jobs. Chartland's owner said and I quote: "The government is killing us." Just how many more homeowners, farmers, workers and businesses is this government going to sacrifice on the altar of high interest?