

Oral Questions

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for the infrastructure program.

At the beginning of this month the government announced the program's first project, a convention centre in Quebec City. Since then many Canadians have wondered how this project was approved prior to the government's announcement on the criteria for qualification.

I would like the minister to explain to this House by what criteria and by what process the project in Quebec City was approved.

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec had for some time been in negotiations with the previous government here in Ottawa with respect to the project of the convention centre in Quebec City. It was anxious because of the change in leadership coming in the Government of Quebec to be able to bring the matter to a head. The premiers had been here on December 21 and had come to an agreement about the the program. They in fact unanimously agreed to be participants in the infrastructure program.

We then said to the Quebec government that it was conditional—and I want to point out that it is conditional upon signing the formal agreement—that the project would be one that could proceed.

Once the formal agreement is signed the project will in fact have to go through all of the tests required. We already have, however, through the Federal Economic Development Agency in Quebec, processed the application on an informal basis. I must say that it is an excellent project. It will put over 1,000 people to work in construction jobs and create more than 400 long-term jobs after that. It is a project that will help get the people in Quebec City, the province of Quebec and Canadians to work and to work fast.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for his clarification. Obviously this was a case of a political announcement occurring before this House was consulted and before criteria were publicly known. It creates the impression that we have another pork-barrel program. What action is the minister going to take to ensure that this type of situation does not occur in the future and what precisely did he do about the fact that the announcement was as ill timed as it was?

• (1445)

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure): Mr. Speaker, this is going to be a very open and transparent program. Information has been supplied to all members of the House with respect to the criteria under which the projects will be examined. The projects are not initiated at the federal level even though the program has been. The projects are initiated at the municipal level and are designed to meet the priorities of local government and the provincial government.

That is what we have done in the case of this project to meet the priorities and the needs of the province of Quebec and the people of Quebec City and with the full support, I might add, of the mayor of Quebec City, members of the Quebec caucus and the Quebec government. I believe that is a good example of how we can get all levels of government together. It is the kind of thing we want to do to make sure this program succeeds, ensure that it be very open and transparent and in fact avoid the very kinds of concerns the member has.

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[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Richard Bélisle (La Prairie): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the President of the Treasury Board. Does the Minister responsible for the Treasury Board intend to react to the request made by the Auditor General who, year after year, has revealed cases of income tax revenue lost as a result of the use of tax shelters, and does he intend to give the Auditor General a clear mandate to evaluate what these tax shelters cost the Federal Treasury?

[English]

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure): Mr. Speaker, the government, as I think was indicated previously by my colleague the Minister of Finance, finds itself very substantially in agreement with most of the observations that have been made in the Auditor General's report. Even though those observations relate to what went on previous to this government taking office, nevertheless it is the responsibility of this government to make sure we respond to the concerns the member has raised.

Indeed, we have already done so to a great extent in things like the opening up of the budget process which my colleague talked about earlier and streamlining the decisions in cabinet and various other programs that have been put forward by the Prime Minister to reduce the costs of operation of different ministries, the size of political perks and many other things. We have responded to some of the concerns the member has raised.