

Oral Questions

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Brian White (Dauphin—Swan River): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. This morning the minister released a discussion paper entitled *Growing Together* which was described as the most comprehensive agriculture review ever undertaken in Canada.

It is fine to speak of change, but the farmers of Canada need to know that the government is truly committed to a new agricultural policy. How does the minister now intend to proceed in translating the principles of this report into much needed agricultural programs?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, what has been tabled today is the beginning of a process and not the end of a process. It is inviting all stakeholders in the agriculture and agri-food industry to participate and work together to develop some solutions to some very important issues that confront agriculture, not only today, but indeed in the future. We have changes in the global trading community. We have changing consumer demands, changing emphasis on food safety and environmental considerations, and the need for adequate safety net systems. What is proposed here is a national agricultural conference which will take place in Ottawa on December 11 and 12. At this time all stakeholders will meet to review some of the very important issues that are outlined in this document.

Together we can build a stronger, more durable and more vibrant agricultural industry.

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PROPOSED GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Paul Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Recently, the chairman of the finance committee, the member for Mississauga South, wrote a letter in reference to the manufacturers' sales tax to a Mr. Conway in Point Claire, Quebec. It states:

You will appreciate that we have been stealing money from the consumers—with the federal sales tax. This year we will be stealing \$17.3 billion without most people knowing about it.

Does the government agree with this characterization of the MST? If so, is it guilty of aiding and abetting, having raised the MST four times since 1984?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for drawing the attention of the House to one of the finer letters of the member—and one of the more moderate.

What I think the member was trying to say, perhaps in his own inimitable fashion, was that Canada is the only country with a manufacturers' sales tax, that there are 48 of our leading competitors who have the equivalent of the GST, and it is time we moved into the next century and got a GST rather than the old MST.

Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister accepts the vocabulary of the member for Mississauga South, I am sure he will accept his characterization of the GST. He stated:

We may have been gouging and screwing you. Now you know we are gouging and screwing you.

Perhaps if some people know that they are being gouged and screwed they will make less demands on government.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, I hope my mother isn't watching.

Mr. Speaker: I think your mother hopes you will stop reading.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Martin (LaSalle—Émard): Mr. Speaker, my question for the Prime Minister is this. Does he agree with this rather succinct and concise description of his government's economic policy?

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, inasmuch as my mother watches this I wouldn't even touch that with a ten-foot pole.

But I know my hon. friend from LaSalle—Émard will want to thank the member for Mississauga South for having provided him with some of his finer lines.

I think the very distinguished chairman of the finance committee of the House has been effective to the point where he has obscured some of the members of this cabinet, and that is pretty tough to do.