

Oral Questions

The study concluded that each year, lower mainland motorists are undercharged by \$2,600 for the actual costs incurred by their driving activities. The report went on to say that if drivers were held accountable for all costs associated with driving, the price of gas would rise by \$1.60 per litre.

I seriously hope the B.C. government will think twice before raising taxes as this report suggests.

As an MP for a riding adjacent to the United States, I also know that increased gas taxes will cause more people to go south to purchase their gas. Once there, they will also do some other shopping. Over the past year, as the Canadian dollar has increased in value and Canadian stores have become more competitive, we have seen a steady decrease in the number of cross-border shoppers.

Additional gasoline taxes in British Columbia would put a stop to the improving cross-border shopping picture and hurt our recovering economy at the same time. I urge the premier and the B.C. New Democrats to think again before taking this short-sighted step.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*English*]

BUDGET

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the Prime Minister.

Last December when the Minister of Finance made his economic statement he promised a budget in the month of February. When 1993 arrived he said that there was to be a budget but not in February, probably in March.

Last week his press secretary said that the Minister of Finance would not run for the leadership of his party because he was extremely busy preparing the budget.

Yesterday we heard there will probably be no budget at all. Will the Prime Minister tell us what is the most important thing: the future of the Conservative Party or jobs for Canadians? We need jobs very badly.

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have tried to do in the last

eight or nine years is to introduce budgets on a fairly regular cycle. They have been preceded by budgetary consultations with the budget usually presented in the first quarter of the year, or thereabouts.

It is helpful for provincial governments and for others who have to go into the market. We have found that to be quite a helpful national issue.

Because of the referendum, that was slightly changed inasmuch as the government felt it appropriate to bring in a major economic statement on December 2.

The Minister of Finance is presently evaluating the impact of this and is continuing this very day his pre-budget consultations across the country. When the Minister of Finance returns from his consultations he will meet with cabinet and recommend a course of action in regard to a budget or an appropriate economic statement.

• (1420)

I will wait for him to return and listen to his advice. Cabinet will make a decision at the earliest possible moment.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear the point made by the Prime Minister.

However there was another point made yesterday by the Minister of Finance when he said he might not have a budget because there is a Tory convention going on and the candidates do not want to have a budget too close to the leadership convention of the Conservative Party.

I ask the Prime Minister what is important in Canada, the leadership of the Tories or the economy for Canadians?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend knows of course that the Minister of Finance did not say what my hon. friend has just ascribed to him. That is a complete distortion of what the Minister of Finance said.

I point out to my hon. friend that the Minister of Finance and his predecessor the Minister for International Trade have brought in policies that have resulted in the interest rates today which are the lowest in 20 years and the inflation rate which is the lowest in 30 years. Economic growth is strong. We will be leading the IMF countries next year. Employment growth will be the highest of the OECD countries.