

Oral Questions

In response to the hon. member's question, let me also refer to another affidavit, which I am sure she has before her, even though she did not mention it, and that is of Norman Spector. He talked about the fact that Premier Devine visited with him and talked about a proposal. A proposal in my mind, again as a layperson, is very much different than an agreement.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

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THE ECONOMY

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Deputy Prime Minister.

In about a month, almost 16,000 more Canadian jobs have been lost. This weekend New Democratic leaders from across the country met to discuss the very serious state of the economy, and it is the same everywhere. Whether it is the family farm that is being devastated, fisheries, or the manufacturing sector, the economy is in big trouble.

The job losses mount each week with 310 jobs losses in Kamloops, 240 in Windsor, 370 in Brantford, 200 in McMasterville, 461 in Timmins, and so on. The list continues. These are people we are talking about and it is a very, very serious situation for Canadian families across the country.

There was a consensus by New Democratic leaders that a national crisis requires a national solution. I ask the Deputy Prime Minister, when will the Prime Minister be prepared to announce a first ministers' meeting on the economy so that all the provinces, territories, and the federal government can discuss this?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

• (1450)

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has commented on this, but I do want to say to the hon. member that I will be having a meeting with the finance ministers from the provinces. We have not set a specific date, but it is traditional at this time of year for us to get together to review the state of the economy, to review what policies might be put in place, both federally and provincially, and to consider this in the context of the budgets that will be forthcoming from all of our governments early in the New Year.

At that time we will be able to address some of the concerns that she has very appropriately put before the House.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot wait. It is a national crisis. Surely, it is serious enough that Canadians every day lose jobs. They do not know how they are going to put food on the table. Economic indicators again today from Statistics Canada indicate that the economy is going down. Surely, this is an important enough situation for the Prime Minister himself to meet with the premiers and to address the situation. The Minister of Finance has repeatedly told us his plan to meet the needs of the international money markets. Would the Deputy Prime Minister tell us what the government's plan is to meet the real needs of Canadians, to do something about creating jobs, and to make the economy more healthy?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, we have been quite clear what the plans, proposals, and strategies should be to address the current weakness in the economy.

We have indicated that as soon as we saw the weakness developing in the spring of this year, we could see a reduction in interest rates. That reduction has continued through. We have had about one and a half percentage points since the peak of interest rates in the spring of this year.

As the weakness in the economy continues and as we see a continuation in the easing of inflationary pressures, we should be able to see a continuation of that drop in interest rates.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Finance. He talks about addressing the inflation rate, but the government and the Minister of Finance are prepared to introduce the GST which, by the government's own admission, is going to increase inflation. From that we have to assume that the interest rates will go up again.

If the Minister of Finance is serious about the inflation rate and if he is serious about having lower interest rates and yet by introducing the GST is going to increase inflation, will the Minister of Finance withdraw the GST now and keep the interest rates down?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.