

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, last night the Minister of Finance said that Canada's provincial Premiers had expressed their support for the concept of a GST, but he refuses to repeat that statement here in the House of Commons. The Minister of Finance should speak frankly and honestly here in the House of Commons and before all Canadians. I repeat: Will the Minister of Finance name one Premier who agrees with him on this issue? If he cannot, he should say so and withdraw his comments immediately.

[English]

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, I think the context is quite clear in the program that was aired last night that I was referring to the provinces and, in particular, the meetings that I have been having with the finance ministers. I will be quite precise with the finance ministers and with my comments about the finance ministers.

One finance minister has said that he absolutely disagrees with sales taxes and that is quite clear. It is the province of Alberta. It has made that known publicly on many occasions. But for two years I sat at the table with other provinces represented by their finance ministers and at no time did people say that we should stop talking about this.

Mr. Broadbent: Did they say go ahead with it?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): They agreed with the fact that we had to go ahead with the change from the federal sales tax to something like the goods and services tax and that is precisely what we are doing.

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MEMBER OF THE SENATE

Hon. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. We are wondering what can be made of the about-face of the Prime Minister on the Cogger affair that, to quote him, it was both forthcoming and proper for the Senate to hold hearings, and forthcoming and proper for the Senate not to hold them, both statements having been made after it became clear that the RCMP was seized of the matter.

My question for the Deputy Prime Minister is, bearing in mind that there were valid concerns about the conduct

of departments and agencies in relation to Senator Cogger, as well as things done by the senator which may not amount to criminal activity but which are nonetheless unacceptable and worthy of being examined by the Senate, will the government not agree that the Senate should proceed to do its work and to do it in its own time frame?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to make a decision in the other place. I am sure that they can make their decisions on their own, and as they will.

I remind the hon. member that there is an RCMP investigation into this. It was the senator himself who asked for the Senate to set up a proper mechanism to hear this particular issue and it will decide in a normal manner. I am not sure what is so bothersome to the hon. member about that process.

Mr. Kaplan: I am glad to hear that the government is prepared to recognize the responsibility of the Senate in the matter and for its own timing.

Let me ask the Deputy Prime Minister—

Mr. Speaker: I am having a little difficulty understanding on what basis the hon. member is asking the government in this place about what the Senate is or is not doing. It may be a very interesting inquiry, and often is, but I do not know that it has anything to do with the administration of government. I will hear the hon. member's question.

Mr. Kaplan: The Senate has a representative in the cabinet who has taken a position on this matter on behalf of the government. I want to ask the Deputy Prime Minister, in the light of what I gather is another flip-flop today from what the Prime Minister was saying yesterday, will the government instruct its minister, the Government Leader in the Senate, not to take a position against the Senate holding hearings and holding hearings in its own time frame?

Mr. Mazankowski: Sir, I am sure the Government Leader in the Senate will act in accordance with the customary practices that are normal. I really find it quite strange that the hon. member is troubled by this.

The opposition raised this issue on the floor of the House, action has been taken, they are still not satisfied. What more do they want?