

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Andre: Madam Speaker, given the fact that there could be this confusion on July 1 if there is not a pricing agreement, could the minister enlighten the House about just what plans he has in mind?

Is it his intention to let market forces—in other words, the world price—dictate? Is it his intention to let Alberta unilaterally set the price? Is it his intention to have the federal government unilaterally set the price? If it is the latter choice, under what legislation? Is he contemplating bringing in the Petroleum Administration Act?

Can he enlighten the House and the country as to what his plans are? That date is very rapidly approaching and, given the minister's record, one is not being unfair in assuming that he will probably not reach that target by July 1.

[Translation]

Mr. Lalonde: Madam Speaker, there is little to add to what I have already said, namely, that our objective is to reach an agreement. We must proceed step by step. I think it would be irresponsible on my part to speculate on events which have not yet taken place and which, hopefully, will not take place. In any case, I hope we will reach an agreement by the end of June and I am working with this objective in mind.

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[English]

CONSUMER AFFAIRS**JUSTIFICATION FOR CERTAIN DEPARTMENT STORES
INCREASING FINANCE CHARGES**

Mr. Ray Skelly (Comox-Powell River): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. It is asked in the context of the destructive level of interest rates in this country and the fact that those interest rates have started to come down, no thanks to the government.

Would the minister undertake to investigate and report to this House what justification exists for Sears and The Bay to raise their finance charges from 21 per cent to 23 per cent effective October 1 this year, at a time when their profits are running at about 80 per cent over last year?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Postmaster General): Madam Speaker, obviously the question raised by the hon. member is a matter of concern not only for my own department but for the Canadian government as a whole. I would suggest to the hon. member that he put his question to my colleague, the Minister of Finance, who has broader powers than me in this regard.

[English]

Mr. Skelly: Madam Speaker, in the interest of protecting the consumers of this country, I also refer to the minister the question of possibly looking into Master Charge and Chargex

interest rates—since these are consumer affairs—which have run at roughly 18 per cent to 20 per cent. In the case of Imperial Oil, its finance charges are increasing from 21 per cent to 24 per cent. Will the minister call in the heads of these companies and ask them to stop literally gouging the Canadian public?

[Translation]

Mr. Ouellet: Madam Speaker, the answer I gave to the hon. member on his first question applies to the second question as well.

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[English]

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION**DIRECTIVES TO MINISTERS**

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. In the Speech from the Throne, the government committed itself to the introduction of a freedom of information act. However, to date no such act has been introduced in Parliament.

May I ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether, pending the introduction of such an act, the Prime Minister has issued any directives to member of the cabinet to the effect that they should conduct themselves in strict adherence and compliance with the principles of freedom of information?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Yes, Madam Speaker. We expect to bring in a proposed freedom of information act or have it passed as soon as possible. In the meantime, the government is adhering to the policy guidelines with respect to communications to the public by public servants.

Mr. Nielsen: Ours, or yours?

Mr. Beatty: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Minister of Communications, who has responsibility in the government for the whole issue of freedom of information.

May I ask the Minister of Communications whether, in keeping with the principle of freedom of information, he will follow the practice established by the previous government of making available to Parliament and to the public the membership of cabinet committees?

Hon. Francis Fox (Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): Madam Speaker, my responsibility in the matter is to introduce freedom of information legislation. We are looking at the matter very closely at the moment. We are reviewing the bill which in many respects was a very good bill and which was introduced by the former government. We are examining the criticisms made of that bill, and hope to come up with an improved bill in the near future.

Concerning the question of publication of lists of cabinet committees, that is obviously a question which should be