

to negotiate in areas of constitutional concern and direct responsibility to the provinces with those provinces, could the minister explain to the House why, in the case of Quebec, he flies in opposition not only of the government of that province but all the opposition parties in the province, all the opposition parties in this House and the elected provincial governments of every province? In fact, is he not contributing to the disunity of Canada by the absurd position he has taken?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, the best way to speak about unity in this country would be to acknowledge that it was the first time in the history of this country that the Minister of Finance took the liberty of going to the provincial ministers of finance to discuss his budget before presenting it.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): And you botched it.

Mr. Chrétien: I did it, and I presented a proposition. After the decision of the Quebec government I consulted all the provinces and some, unfortunately, are not in agreement with what I am doing today. I have talked to all the ministers of finance and most of them, indeed all of them, would have preferred Quebec to have accepted my original proposal. It would have been the best way to have a united economic policy developed by all ministers of finance and the federal Minister of Finance for the first time in history.

● (1427)

Quebec decided to go its own way, however, trying to divide the Canadian market. I could not make the same offer to the other provinces because I know they would have been quite willing themselves to choose the selective route. Ontario could have decided to go that way on the automobile industry, which would have been good in the hon. member's riding but it would not have been acceptable to the other provinces. That is why I am living up to the offer I made and compensating the federal taxpayers in Quebec for the money they do not get through the provincial government.

[Translation]

PAYMENT TO QUEBEC FOR SELECTIVE SALES TAX REDUCTIONS

Mr. Gilles Caouette (Témiscamingue): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary for the Minister of Finance.

Since he seems to accuse the Quebec minister of finance of not doing justice to Quebeckers, how can he pretend to do justice to them when he intends to refund the amount to Quebeckers by way of a tax repayment or compensation and only to those who pay income tax to the federal government? How will the other Quebeckers get their share of this repayment?

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, when it was suggested that repayments be made directly to individual taxpayers, one of the hon. members in the hon. member's party objected because in his opinion we were trying to buy votes.

Oral Questions

Here is what we are going to do in the circumstances: to those Quebec residents who pay federal income tax every year we will repay the amount the Quebec government did not want in order to reduce by 2 per cent during six months the other items not covered by the sales tax.

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[English]

FISHERIES

INTERIM AGREEMENT WITH UNITED STATES

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Fisheries, who was on the west coast over the weekend and knows some of the problems we face there and the difficulties of implementing the interim agreement.

According to press reports, the minister agreed to closure of the Swiftsure fishing grounds to Canadians in order to gain some concessions from the United States. I wonder whether he could say if this closure applies to Canadians and the Americans, and what concessions he hoped to get from the United States on this particular occasion?

Hon. Roméo LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries and the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the closure is for Canadian and American fishermen. I do not know where the word "concession" came from. The fact is that the possibility of the closure of Swiftsure was contained in negotiations as a conservation measure. We do not happen to agree on the need for the conservation measure, but it was recognized that it could be requested.

On the other hand, we have informed the United States authorities that we fully expect them to implement the terms of the agreement, including Canadian access for salmon trolling from three to twelve miles off the coast of Washington state and allowing Canadian salmon fishermen to have 26-inch salmon aboard. The American negotiator who was informed of this will obviously talk to his government, and we expect a meeting on the twenty-fourth or the twenty-sixth of this month.

Mr. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. The minister has not said whether concessions were made on the east coast as well. Since the Prime Minister claims to be on such good personal terms with President Carter, why is it necessary for us to get down on our knees and plead and make concessions to the United States when there was, according to the Prime Minister's own words, an agreement that they would see this was implemented?

Mr. LeBlanc (Westmorland-Kent): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the hon. member has been reading some of the press from the west coast which for the last four years has used words like "sell-out" at a time when we have, in fact, negotiated so toughly. We have not been able to reach a permanent agreement and that is why we refused to give in on some fundamental issues where we think Canadian interests should