

Oral Questions

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): No, it was not mine. I did not receive a letter. I made enquiries.

I was sent a copy of a letter, but the request was made to President Clinton, who will answer it himself. I cannot speak for President Clinton.

• (1455)

I would like to point out to the hon. member that I am just back from a trip to six countries, where I never met the leaders of the opposition. I only met the ministers. And I did not object. The point is, this is not a general custom, and when I was leader of the opposition, there were some presidents who came here whom I did not meet, and in fact, in December when President Zedillo came, he did not meet the Leader of the Opposition.

In any case, President Clinton, who received the letter, will respond, and we will see what his answer is. It is not up to me to answer that question.

Mr. Philippe Paré (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, now that he no longer objects publicly to a meeting between Mr. Clinton and the Leader of the Official Opposition, will the Prime Minister promise he will not use pressure tactics or indulge in any behind-the-scenes manoeuvring to try to discourage the U.S. president from meeting the Leader of the Official Opposition?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the normal course of events, President Clinton's letter should come from Washington, not from Ottawa.

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[English]

TAXATION

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Liberals on the Standing Committee of Finance recommended that the government implement a 2-cent per litre tax increase on gasoline as a way of dealing with the deficit. The Minister of Finance has stated that Canadians are up to their eyeballs in debt, but they are also up to their eyeballs in taxes. The tax on gasoline has risen by 466 per cent in the last 10 years.

Could the Minister of Finance tell the House how increasing the tax burden would not further drown Canadians in a sea of ever increasing taxation?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will have to wait for the budget.

Mr. David Chatters (Athabasca, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the same minister.

Consumption taxes account for 52 per cent of the average consumer price for gasoline in Canada, compared to 37 per cent in the United States, our largest competitor and trading partner.

Could the minister explain how siphoning another \$500 million out of the pockets of Canadian taxpayers would enhance Canada's competitiveness, its ability to stimulate the economy and its ability to create jobs?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing has changed in the last 30 seconds nor in the last 15 minutes nor in the last hour. The member will have to wait for the budget.

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GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville—Milton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Revenue.

We all know that GST credits are supposed to be paid only to low income Canadians. It has been reported that they are also being paid to those with incomes above \$100,000.

Is this true? If so, what is the minister doing to stop it?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question which allows me to correct and clarify some misunderstandings on this subject.

The GST credit is for low income Canadians. For example, a Canadian family of four with a family income of \$38,000 would be above the limit for any GST credit. Eligibility is based on family income and this reflects the situation of these low income Canadians.

I should add, however, that it is net income that creates the entitlement to the GST credit. There may be cases of people with high nominal incomes but low net incomes who can in fact obtain benefit from the system through the GST credit. We are doing our best to tighten up the system.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Prime Minister. In another of his surprising pronouncements, last Friday in Toronto, the Prime Minister said that there are public servants who are paid to sit around and do nothing. He was immediately contradicted by the President of the Treasury Board.

Given that he was contradicted by his own minister, does the Prime Minister maintain that there are federal public servants who are paid to sit around and do nothing? If so, how many are there, and if not, was he referring to those three National