

*Oral Questions***PUBLIC WORKS**

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Works.

Yesterday the Federal Court ruled that the government acted unfairly when it recommended choosing the second highest bid to accommodate the data centre for the goods and services tax.

Will the minister explain to the House today why the government chose to award the contract to the second highest rather than to the lowest qualified bidder?

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I was not here yesterday for my colleague's question. I can simply point out to him that I have not had a chance as yet to read Mr. Justice Strayer's decision, but as far as the criteria are concerned I understand from my officials that there were factors taken into account such as security, working conditions, and quantifying the value of the premises. This process, as my colleague who is the official critic knows, is completely transparent. Any of the bidders who are curious can find out all the criteria by simply consulting with the department.

• (1440)

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, will the minister tell this House whether or not negotiations have taken place with any of the four bidders prior to putting out the formal tender call?

Hon. Elmer M. MacKay (Minister of Public Works): Not to my knowledge, Mr. Speaker. There may well have been.

I can assure my colleague that I noted with interest his suggestion that the government take a look at economizing and using existing premises. I will inquire as to the answer he wishes. I have no knowledge of what negotiations went on, if any.

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[*Translation*]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Yesterday, the Chairman of the Finance Committee presented a motion to end the discussion on the GST.

Mr. Speaker, many people would like to give their opinion on this tax. Closing off the discussion is unacceptable. How will the Deputy Prime Minister ensure that these people can continue to discuss this crucial matter?

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the unfortunate thing about last night is that there were witnesses waiting to be heard, anxious to be heard and could not be heard because of the obstructionist tactics of the New Democratic Party.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rodriguez: You denied them the opportunity. You didn't want them there.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, this is not new. This has happened before. What these tactics fail to take into account is the fact that we have had a debate on the goods and services tax which started with the release of the White Paper on tax reform in June 1987.

We had consultations and discussions with people in the private sector, with provinces, with various groups interested in this issue. It was discussed many times during the election campaign. It was the subject of extensive hearings in the fall by the finance committee.

We believe that the time has come when actions and decisions should be taken. We have had nearly three years of discussion on the goods and services tax and the whole proposal for sales tax reform.

Ms. Audrey McLaughlin (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

Canadians do not want this tax. Canadians want to be heard about this tax. The government continues to refuse to listen to Canadians. The committee did not travel to all provinces. The New Democratic Party is simply saying: listen to Canadians.

I ask the Deputy Prime Minister again: Will he show that this government is prepared to listen to Canadians and ensure Canadians that he will not invoke closure either in the committee or in this House so that Canadians can have full discussion of the goods and services tax and present their alternatives as we have done as a party?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that Canadians want to be heard. They have been heard. We have listened very carefully to what Canadians have said about sales tax reform. We have made a number of changes to the sales