

*Oral Questions***ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS**

On a broader side, the government is working toward creating and taking the leadership in creating a program that will bring in the private sector, that will bring in labour, that will bring in the provinces and that will bring in the municipalities so that we can deal with this on a society-wide basis and make sure that we come up with a resolution that will resolve this matter sooner, rather than later.

Mr. Jim Jordan (Leeds—Grenville): With reference to the reply I got, Madam Speaker, I want to remind the minister that facilitating the entry of Americans into Canada at border points is a good idea. We agree with that, but that is only one issue.

Addressing the attraction to shop in the U.S. on a regular basis by Canadians is a very different issue.

My supplementary question is for the same minister. With an estimated annual \$1 billion in lost retail sales in Ontario alone for the current year, not to mention the thousands of lost jobs in the retail industry, can the minister tell me what concrete and immediate plans he has to address this tendency for more and more Canadians to do their regular weekly shopping in the United States?

Hon. Otto Jelinek (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I touched on that question in my first response but, to be more specific about it, as far as the customs operations are concerned I repeat that we are accelerating the use of technology through automated cash registers to make way for a more efficient and effective way of collecting duties and taxes.

We have put in recently in British Columbia a pilot project which is going to relieve the congestion at the border, revitalize the tourist industry in British Columbia, and allow for expanded commercial traffic in that province. We are going to be monitoring that and hopefully be expanding it to other parts of the country.

I have finished meeting on a bilateral basis with mayors from border communities this last week. We look forward to continuing to meet with them to come up with a marketing program that will allow Canadians to realize that by going south of the border to shop they in fact are hurting themselves, Canadian retailers and the Canadian economy as a whole.

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Nunatsiaq): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Multiculturalism and Citizenship. It concerns the aboriginal representative organizations program.

Over the past few years funding for this program has been cut and the program actually expired two weeks ago, on March 31. The minister of state has not yet made a decision on whether to extend or renew this program.

Will the minister tell the House today whether and when he intends to renew this program?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Secretary of State of Canada and Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship)): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to indicate that yes, the program has made a very important contribution to the vitality and to the sustenance of the community.

We are currently in the process of reviewing very carefully what was in place. With my colleagues in caucus and cabinet, we are now examining where we go from here, but I am not in a position yet to reveal the details this morning.

Mr. Jack Iyerak Anawak (Nunatsiaq): Madam Speaker, let me quote from the Main Estimates about the program:

This program provides program funding to Inuit, Métis and non-status Indian and status Indian representative organizations which work to enable aboriginal people to participate in the political, social and economic life of Canada.

I have a supplementary question. The 32 aboriginal groups who use this program need to assure their clients and their banks that their funding is forthcoming and they cannot afford to wait for the minister to make up his mind.

Will the minister agree to release the funds available for this program today so these aboriginal organizations can get on with their important work?

Hon. Gerry Weiner (Secretary of State of Canada and Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship)): Madam Speaker, we are very understanding of the situation that the groups find themselves in today. They have been very important and supportive of our desire to