

Main Estimates 1982-83

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo) will not find any specific item in the Main Estimates entitled western development fund. Perhaps I could take a moment to explain how these estimates are made up as against the expenditure plan.

Mr. Waddell: Tell us about the western development fund.

Mr. Johnston: If one looks at the chart on page 7 in Part I of the government expenditure plan, one will see that the total outlays predicted for 1982-1983 are \$76.3 billion. On the other hand, total estimates, in other words the estimates that appear in the book, are considerably less than that, namely \$74.1 billion. This number of \$76.3 billion is the estimated total outward expenditure after providing for reserves and for the customary lapse, which, as I recall, is estimated in 1982-83 to be something in the neighbourhood of \$1.23 billion. So there is an area in there, Madam Speaker, with respect to policy reserves. When programs are brought forward and announced by ministers which do not appear in the Main Estimates, I will be bringing forward on their behalf, supplementary estimates detailing the appropriations required to support those programs.

• (1620)

Mr. Hovdebo: That is very much a smokescreen, Madam Speaker. The western development fund is a mirage. The minister's officials explained very carefully to us exactly what the extra reserves were for. They are not for long-budgeted items such as the western development fund, so that smoke-screen type of explanation does not follow the minister's officials' position.

I would like to know whether it is possible to move moneys into the western development fund. Is that the process, or is it just a mirage? Could he tell us exactly what the western development fund is since it was budgeted so long ago?

[Translation]

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, there is not much that I would add to the answers I have already given on the subject. Obviously there is a margin, there is a reserve, there are programs that will be tabled here in the House by our colleagues—I am here today to answer questions on the estimates. I have not mentioned the western development fund in my speech nor in my comments nor in the analysis I have given in the House today. I should like such questions to be put to my colleagues who are responsible for such matters.

[English]

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Saskatoon West): Madam Speaker, I have listened to my colleague the hon. member for Portage-Marquette (Mr. Mayer) and the hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Hovdebo) trying to find out about a matter which has been touted and promised by the Liberal government ever since the last Speech from the Throne. To then find out that the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Johnston) does not even know what the western development fund is all about is a

matter which causes a lot of concern and chagrin to those of us in western Canada.

The only question I want to ask the minister is if he would confirm—this will, of course, get a great laugh across western Canada—that there is nothing in the current estimates dealing with the western development fund as such.

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, it is not a question of confirming that there is nothing in the current estimates regarding that fund. The estimates are there for programs and for the ongoing operations of the government. They are divided into the voted programs and statutory programs. The Main Estimates are deposited to be referred to committee and will subsequently be the subject of an appropriation bill in this House. The hon. member will have ample opportunity to examine those programs in committee.

As I pointed out, the estimates are only part of the over-all expenditure plan which provides for reserves, for programs such as the western development fund, which programs, whatever the details may be, will be announced in due course by the responsible ministers. They will be the subject of supplementary estimates, and the hon. member, who has been in this House a great deal longer than I have, will then know that he can in turn go back to the responsible minister, examine him in committee, and in turn the programs will be the subject of further appropriation bills in this House.

Mr. Hnatyshyn: What concerns me, Madam Speaker, is that the last time the minister tabled the Main Estimates there was a provision for \$350 million for the western development fund. That has evaporated. Yet we have had statements by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin), the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) and the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) that this in fact will be forthcoming and is a firm commitment of the government.

I would simply make the comment that the government has again failed western Canada and it is no wonder the Liberals are doing so poorly politically out there.

Mr. Johnston: Madam Speaker, I can understand the hon. member playing politics when the President of the Treasury Board responds to questions on the estimates, but surely any objective assessment of the programs committed to during the last two years by this government to western Canada development is enough to allay the fears of any westerner that the government is not committed to western programs.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

(Questions answered orally are indicated by an asterisk.)

Mr. David Smith (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Madam Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 3,483.