

Oral Questions

Mr. Crombie: Madam Speaker, the problem of one million unemployed in this country is not to be dealt with in such a light fashion. I would like to ask the minister another question. If he has also read the report of the council, he will know they say that "the budget is antagonistic towards the unemployed, most of whom are women, youth and the handicapped". I would like to know, as would the people, what the minister intends to do with those groups now and in the future. When will he quit trying to blame other people for his failure to meet his responsibilities?

Mr. Axworthy: As the hon. member well knows, in the job creation programs which we introduced this summer to replace the ones the previous government had cancelled—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Axworthy: —we put the priority on the hiring of women. We established the affirmative action principle so that priority would be given to the hiring of women, young people and minority groups.

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CONSUMER AFFAIRS

PROJECTED INCREASE IN FOOD PRICES

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. I do not know what the minister knows about the fiscal management of families, but most members in this House know that a family's fiscal and financial management shows up at the check-out counter of the grocery store. The minister projected food prices to rise 12 per cent next year. With the depreciation in the current value of our dollar from the minister's projections, and bearing in mind that food prices are really affected by exchange rates, will the minister confirm that on the basis of the depreciation of the dollar the increase in food prices next year is likely to be more like 15 per cent or 16 per cent?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): No, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Blenkarn: Madam Speaker, the minister made all sorts of other projections. He projected that the exchange value of the dollar would be 86 cents this year and 87½ cents next year. My supplementary question is in connection with fuel oil. The minister knows, as a result of his inept budget, that he will have to pay more for imported oil next year than he anticipated. Would the minister tell the House how much more it will cost people to purchase heating oil as a result of depreciation in the value of the dollar? I would remind him that he has already spent—

● (1420)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Blenkarn: —over \$250 million to prop up the dollar.

Madam Speaker: Order. The question has been asked.

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, I would like to hear the question, if I may.

Mr. Blenkarn: Madam Speaker, due to the depreciation of our dollar we will have to pay more for foreign oil. Will the cost of that foreign oil be reflected in the price people will have to pay for heating oil, and so on, as a result of this problem?

Mr. MacEachen: Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows that a large number of projections were made in the budget, and especially in the budget papers extending over a period of four years. He knows as well as I that it is very risky business indeed to make projections for six months in an uncertain economy and an uncertain world, let alone for four years. I put forward those projections in order to give the fullest possible information to the Canadian public and in accordance with the useful precedent established by my predecessor. But I believe that at this stage to regard the projections as hard reality is a bit risky. For that reason I do not intend to be drawn into making long-term cost estimates on the basis of long-term projections except where necessary.

Mr. Paproski: Why don't you just say 36 cents a gallon?

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NORTHERN PIPELINES

ALASKA GAS PIPELINE—ASSURANCE OF U.S. FINANCIAL GUARANTEES

Mr. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. Last week the minister expressed his serious concern that the \$23 billion Alaska highway natural gas pipeline might not be completed. He at last recognized that reality. He said that "activity must be increased. There has already been too much delay."

Since President Carter failed to obtain from Congress any financial guarantees for the northern pipeline and provided instead simply a personal letter of endorsement to the Government of Canada at the last minute—which certainly is quite worthless now—will the minister ensure that representatives of the Canadian government contact president-elect Reagan early (a) to obtain his personal commitment to this project, and (b), more importantly, to obtain his assurance that he will request the newly-elected Congress to provide the iron-clad financial guarantees which the minister himself said were so essential to this project?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Madam Speaker, contrary to what the Leader of the New Democratic Party has just said, I have not raised doubts as to the construction of the pipeline. I indicated quite clearly in a speech which I made in Vancouver that there was no justification or reason for doubting that Congress and the President would continue to be completely committed to the construction of that pipeline. However, I said that since the signing of the treaty several years ago there has been too much