

Oral Questions

Act is opened. It must be opened every 10 years and that is something we can look at then.

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HOUSING

Mr. David Bjornson (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a question to the Minister of State for Housing. Prior to coming to the House I was in the construction industry. I still have many friends working in the home renovation industry.

They keep voicing their concerns to me about the implications of GST in the home renovation industry. They have concerns about whether or not these people are going to go to the underground economy and do things themselves. Has your department considered the implications of bringing GST in and what the repercussions will be for the home renovation industry.

Hon. Alan Redway (Minister of State (Housing)): Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, in other jurisdictions such as New Zealand where a similar tax to the GST has been introduced, there has not been growth in the number of people who have gone to the underground economy, the cash economy. Rather, it has been the reverse because if one goes on a cash basis one does not receive the benefit of the credits that flow from the GST that has been paid in the past. In that way, it is likely we will see less of an underground economy, particularly in the home renovation industry.

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[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Yesterday, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women said that the President of the Treasury Board had announced the fairest pay equity plan ever seen in this country.

The Human Rights Commissioner does not agree. The Commissioner severely criticized the President of the Treasury Board for acting unilaterally in deciding to grant women half the compensation to which they were entitled, by depriving them of benefits and denying them two years back pay, while failing to provide for any real equality in rates of pay.

When will the government stop this charade and pay women in the Public Service what has so long been rightfully theirs?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is aware that the President of the Treasury Board has announced a \$317 million retroactive payment which amounts to an average of some \$4,900 per person.

There is an ongoing amount of some \$76 million per year which will be paid as recognition of the responsibilities that the government has taken on the question of pay equity. We believe that this is a generous and fair approach. We think that it recognizes the responsibilities that were acknowledged back in 1985 when the union-management committee was established.

I believe what my colleague the President of the Treasury Board has done is a very fair response.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. The Minister of Finance is obviously unaware that the human rights commissioner does not agree with him. He thinks these people are getting half of what they deserve, that equalization payments are not pay equity, that only salary adjustments are pay equity. He also believes they are being deprived of benefits and that this is a plan that comes nowhere near meeting the complaints these people, 70,000 of them, have before the Human Rights Commission and have had since 1983-84. Will this government stop stalling, stop hiding behind technicalities, stop trying to bribe people to give up on their rights and give people the pay they deserve.

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I find it hard to understand the attitude that the hon. member is expressing.

When we came into office, we recognized there was a problem that had been outstanding and festering for a number of years under the government of the party that she represents.

In 1985 we established a union-management committee. We have made retroactive payments to 1985. Seventy thousand public servants will benefit from these payments. I understand that the chairman of the Human Rights Commission has been in contact with the President of the Treasury Board and that the President of the Treasury Board will be communicating with him in due