

Oral Questions

Will the minister please inform the House that he is willing to stop studying this and give an immediate increase to those Canadians covered by the minimum federal wage, which is now the lowest in the country?

Hon. Marcel Danis (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague would know, there are very few people working at the minimum wage at the federal level. Most people who work at the federal level earn much more than the federal minimum wage.

In any case, I have made a recommendation to my colleagues to increase the minimum wage and I am convinced I will be in a position to do so in the new year.

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CORPORATE TAXATION

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago Consumers Gas temporarily shifted \$275 million of its debt from commercial paper into bankers acceptance notes, which for some reason are not subject to the large corporations tax.

The company's treasurer told the Ontario Energy Board that this move would save the company \$500,000 in the large corporations tax.

I want to ask the Minister of National Revenue if he knows that his officials are telling corporate tax lawyers to go ahead and use this loophole. Does he know that most large corporations have their financial year end at the end of December and that they are now lining up to do this tax accountant's two-step? If he does know something about it, when is he going to make it clear to these companies that they are not able to avoid paying their fair share of taxes in this way and do something about it.

Hon. Otto Jelinek (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, as to the latter part of the hon. member's question, it is not a question of when I will let the companies know. I already have. In my speech to the Canadian Tax Foundation last week, I made it very clear that we have accelerated revenue collections and targeting particularly on large corporations. We are guaranteeing my colleague, the Minister of Finance, at least \$400 million in additional revenue which is already geared for the farm assistance program.

I can tell the hon. member that we are going to go further than that. This government is committed to making sure that every corporation in this country pays its fair share of taxes.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg Transcona): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that the \$400 million he is talking about in terms of stricter enforcement is different from this question of bankers acceptance notes and the way in which many corporations are now lining up to avoid this government's flagship as far as tax fairness is concerned.

I am asking the minister today: Will he issue a directive now to make sure that these corporations cannot avoid paying their fair share of that tax while other people are lining up at food banks, the very children that we are talking about going hungry while these corporations stand to not pay \$500,000 worth of taxes, just one company?

Hon. Otto Jelinek (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I do not have to issue any directive because that is the policy of this government already.

I want to assure the hon. member in connection with his previous question that no official from Revenue Canada, that I am aware of, gives any instructions to any business to take advantage of any loopholes. In fact, this government has taken major steps over the last years to eliminate the loopholes that existed prior to the election of this government.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr. Réginald Bélair (Cochrane—Superior): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister for International Trade.

Today the U.S. International Trade Commission voted three to zero to proceed with an investigation of Canadian softwood lumber. We have lost round one. The U.S. industry wants duties of up to 25 per cent.

What is the government going to do to make sure that we do not lose the second round?

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Industry, Science and Technology and Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. friend is aware of the fact that this is the preliminary injury determination. It is the first of four stages. Normally in this first stage the commission rules in favour of the U.S. industry. That is