

FARM CREDIT CORPORATION

INTEREST RATE LEVELS—REQUEST FOR RELIEF

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture who knows that farmers are generally facing very poor prices this year and have used up any reserves which may have existed in the farming community. Some 7,549 farmers are caught in a loan situation with Farm Credit Corporation with interest at 16 3/4 per cent. Another 1,250 farmers have loans which were under a program whereby the Government reduced interest charges by 4 per cent. Both of these groups are hurting badly now that the 4 per cent program has been stopped. Does the Minister intend to bring in a program to reduce the amount of interest which these people are paying to somewhere in the neighbourhood of 13 per cent or lower?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Yes, Mr. Speaker.

TIMING OF ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, will the Minister inform the House how soon he is intending to do this because farmers are attempting to make plans for the next crop, and some are in fact facing bankruptcy, not knowing what is the plan of the Government?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): I hope soon, Mr. Speaker.

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NATIONAL REVENUE

DEPARTMENT'S REFUSAL TO APOLOGIZE TO TAXPAYERS

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Revenue. One of the criticisms which David Cruickshank levelled at the Department when he resigned was that he and other employees were instructed by their superiors never to apologize to a taxpayer. I have several cases, one of which I raised with the Minister the other day in the House, where the Department has made serious mistakes which have caused needless difficulty and, indeed, severe financial embarrassment. Yet the Department refuses to apologize. What rationale is there for a policy like that, and when is it going to be changed?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Hon. Member to read the folder which has been referred to today. All our employees are asked to be more careful in their contacts with the public as it is our responsibility and our duty to be. Mr. Speaker, when mistakes are made, either as a result of delays or computers issuing a wrong assessment because of wrong data having been fed into

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them, it is our responsibility to express our regrets and to apologize to the taxpayers who have been the victim of such mistakes. I wish to assure the Hon. Member that we do not refuse to apologize, for it is our responsibility to do so.

• (1500)

[English]

TAXPAYERS' CONVERSATIONS WITH OFFICIALS—TAPE RECORDING INQUIRY

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, every time the Minister opens his mouth he confirms that he does not know what is going on. Even when the Department wrongfully seizes bank accounts, people cannot get any kind of apology from the Department.

On another matter, his Deputy Minister said on Friday that he cannot rule out the possibility that some of his officials may be secretly taping telephone calls with taxpayers. That was just after the Minister denied in the House that such a practice existed. It shows once again he does not know what is going on. I ask the Minister if telephone calls are being taped now, have they ever been taped, and, if so, have taxpayers been notified in advance?

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, as I said in the House last Friday and according to the assurances which I received from my officials, it is not a practice of my Department to tape phone calls with taxpayers. I wish to repeat those assurances in the House.

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[English]

NATIONAL REVENUE

REQUEST MINISTER TABLE TERMS OF REFERENCE TO WOODS GORDON

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): A point of order, Mr. Speaker. Before the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Bussières) leaves the House, last Friday he referred to a commission to Woods Gordon and certain terms of reference. He referred to it on the same day in a press release, and again today. Would he be kind enough to table the terms of reference to Woods Gordon and/or the letter of instructions to the firm which contain those terms of reference?

Mr. Pinard: That is not a point of order.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Bussières (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, with leave, I am ready to table in both official languages the order of reference concerning the review of the Taxation Division, Department of National Revenue to be made by Mr. Farlinger.