

Oral Questions

Mr. Althouse: —the kind of systems we have on our side of the border instead of only reflecting the kind of systems and assistance they have on the other side. Why did they not take into account the fact that we have insurance programs and that those should be spread over a number of years, instead of being calculated following the year the pay-out happens to come because of a drought.

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is concerned about the agricultural industry and particularly the grain and oilseeds industry. We share that same concern.

The reason we entered into the agreement with the United States was to open a much, much larger market to Canadian grain producers. We are exporting more grain now to the United States of America than we have ever before.

An hon. member: Exactly. It is working.

Mr. McKnight: I can explain to the hon. member, but rather than my explanation, maybe he would like the explanation of the president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Mr. Jespersen, who said: "We do not dispute the calculations and we do not fear opening of the border. Our superior quality and efficiency allow us to compete with any country in the world. However, we cannot compete with massive export subsidies being used by the United States, in some cases in direct contradiction".

Also, I can inform the hon. member that the Americans do not use the Export Enhancement Program in their own country. Therefore, we are competitive. We are able to command a higher price now than we were able to before. This government will continue to operate effectively and aggressively seek out markets for Canadian grain in the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker: It is time to move on now.

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UNEMPLOYMENT

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Recent reports indicate that 25 per cent of Montrealers are on welfare or unemployment insurance and that Montreal has the highest urban poverty rate in Canada. These statistics are absolutely shocking, yet the government in the Speech from the Throne yesterday has promised new jobs for the year 2000.

What planet is the government living on? If it is really serious about unemployment, why are the government's targets set for the year 2000? Why not job creation goals for the year 1991?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, during the previous session I told the same member why and how the government intended to intervene in Montreal. I said it before, and I say it again, that there are a number of economic development programs in the Montreal region that are working very well, including programs in the East and Southwest. A number of other programs are also being considered at this time, but I may remind the hon. member that the same constants that apply to other parts of the country, apply to Montreal.

As soon as interest rates have gone down, as soon as the drop in interest rates has had a positive impact on the economy, I am sure the Montreal region will be one of the first to take advantage of these measures, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Mr. Speaker, the minister did not answer my question. The fact is that today, 25 per cent of the people in Montreal are unemployed or on welfare, and they need their federal government today, not in the year 2000. Why doesn't the minister have any objectives for 1991?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, if this government were to do what the hon. member's government did in 1982, when it took the kind of measures the hon. member is referring to, the results would be exactly the same as they were at the time, meaning disastrous.

I am sure the hon. member heard last week about Canadair's impressive regional jet, and I think that is the route Montreal, Quebec and Canada in general should follow.

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THE CONSTITUTION

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister responsible for Constitutional Affairs. For five years this government has championed the recognition of Quebec's distinct identity. That recognition was even signed by eleven first ministers. However, in the Speech from the Throne yesterday, there was no reference to Quebec's distinct identity but to Quebec's "unique character". I would like