

Oral Questions

[English]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Brian O'Kurley (Elk Island): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport.

In the past the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan have expressed their intention not to adopt in provincial legislation the national standard for truck drivers' hours of service. As this situation could make the national safety standard virtually unenforceable, could the minister provide this House with an update to this potentially difficult situation?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, it is true that three western provinces have not yet adopted those regulations.

On October 20 there was a meeting in Vancouver between the provinces and the officers of Transport Canada. We made a proposal. We are expecting an answer from the provinces, and we expect to be able to make an announcement soon.

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[Translation]

PROPOSED GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Douglas Young (Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance.

The Minister is well aware that a number of Tory Members seem ready to extend the goods and services tax to the sale of existing houses. I am quite concerned about their approach.

Because Canadians deserve to know, my question to the Minister of Finance is this: Does his government intend to extend its new goods and services sales tax to every house being sold in Canada? Under its proposed policy, is the government bent on taxing not only food, but also existing as well as new houses?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the finance committee report. I am sure my hon. friend is aware of what is in it, but at this point I am not. Whatever comes out of that report is a decision on the part of the committee. Whether it is a majority report or a unanimous report, I am sure he will have something to say on it as well.

At this point in time the government's view is the proposal that is on the table, the proposal that is set out in the technical paper. That does not include the taxation of existing houses. It has the taxation of new houses but with a generous rebate in order to offset the impact on new houses to meet the commitment we made as a government a year ago last September in stating that the GST would not adversely affect the affordability of housing.

Mr. Young (Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, I have another question for the Minister of Finance. Recently we were told by the Minister of Finance that behind closed doors provinces were agreeing with his proposed goods and services tax. We are hearing today that the province of Prince Edward Island, which offered to enter into negotiations, was told that it was not important enough to be considered in any negotiations relating to the goods and services tax.

In view of the fact that he no longer wishes to even discuss the matter of the goods and services tax with the provinces, does this mean that finally he has seen the light and is prepared to withdraw his proposal for a goods and services tax?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, the simple answer to that question is: No, I am not prepared to withdraw. I think the hon. member knew that before he stood up and asked the question.

The statement on the part of one of the finance ministers indicated that there was some veracity to what I had said before, but clearly there are some differences of opinion on the part of the provincial governments. The premiers are not in favour of proceeding at this time.

We have said that a preference would be for a national sales tax. We are not doing things in the GST proposal that would preclude that at some later date, but at some later date future governments will have to make that decision.

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VIA RAIL

Mr. Robert D. Nault (Kenora—Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport. Between the months of January and August of this year more than 86,000 people travelled on the VIA train called The Canadian. Information I have received shows