

Oral Questions

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**EFFECT OF FREE TRADE AGREEMENT ON PROGRAMS**

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, my question is also directed to the Deputy Prime Minister. A few weeks ago, we had a statement by the Deputy Minister of Finance. Today, we have a senior official responsible for regional development confirming our worst fears, namely that regional development programs would be jeopardized by the free trade agreement. What I want to know from the Deputy Prime Minister, since today, the senior official who told the truth probably had to do what a number of Conservative Members have done before him and issue a clarification, and I imagine the responsible Minister called him to ask him to change his story, like Peter White did . . . What I want to know from the Deputy Prime Minister is this: Could he inform the House today why senior officials who administered the program have to consider criteria for U.S. subsidies, while the Government says the exact opposite?

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, the Minister responsible has explained that very well. I do not know why Hon. Members across the aisle want to malign distinguished public servants who have served this country and governments over the years.

What we have here is another classic example of, when all else fails, you wallow around in the mud to see if you can find a little dirt to throw at people. That is exactly what is happening, Mr. Speaker.

I would draw the attention of Hon. Members to an article by John Ferguson which appeared this morning. It talks about the manner in which the Liberal Party has distorted, planted fear, and maligned the elements of the trade deal, all for political partisan advantage. Mr. Ferguson states:

Both play on voters' fear of the unknown.

Both claim to be based on a cool analysis of the facts.

And both are dead wrong.

● (1200)

[Translation]

NEED FOR APPROVAL BY DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister can quote all the newspaper articles he wants, but the fact is that Mr. Lawson's comments are there and they are quite clear.

What I want to ask the Deputy Prime Minister is this: Could he explain why projects are now submitted to the Department of External Affairs before final approval? Could he explain why the Government is taking into consideration the criterion . . .

An Hon. Member: . . . the free trade test.

Mr. Lapierre: . . . the free trade test, as the Hon. Member pointed out? Why has this criterion be added to the list? And could he explain why, since the beginning of these talks, we have been told that free trade would have no impact at all on regional development? Why has the Government been lying to us for months?

[English]

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I will say to the Hon. Member, as I have said to others, once again, that there are no further obligations required of Canada in regard to subsidies under the free trade agreement than already exist under GATT. The Member asks, "Why does one department of government consult with another as to international obligations?" We consult on every western diversification application proposal and contract—every one—with the Department of Justice, because it is a legal contract—and all government departments consult. We consult with the Department of Communications regarding international obligations in that field. We have also consulted on two or three occasions, as Mr. Waddell from the Department of External Affairs has said, with the Department of External Affairs on international trade obligations.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. McKnight: At no time was any project rejected after we had consulted with the Department of External Affairs. Therefore, regional development as well will be built upon with free trade and we will go forward.

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[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**PRESENTATION OF LEGISLATION ON QUALIFYING ELIGIBILITY PERIOD—GOVERNMENT POSITION**

Mr. Gabriel Fontaine (Lévis): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of State (Employment and Immigration) and concerns eligibility criteria for unemployment insurance benefits.

We know that generally speaking, Canadians must have worked fourteen weeks to receive unemployment insurance. We also know that to allow for regional disparities, in some cases Canadians can get unemployment insurance if they have worked less than fourteen weeks. However, the House must first pass a bill, as it has done since 1976.

Madam Minister, do you intend to introduce legislation this year that will allow Canadians to be eligible for unemployment insurance if they have worked less than fourteen weeks?