

Oral Questions

racism in his own department is to put a few of the many scientists among our visible minorities in management positions?

Hon. Pierre H. Cadieux (Minister of State (Youth), Minister of State (Fitness and Amateur Sport) and Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, as the hon. member is aware, tremendous progress has been made in all departments in this respect, including the Department of National Health and Welfare. However, I admit there is room for improvement.

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[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture, whose announcement yesterday has left many farmers disappointed and confused.

Farmers will have to wait even longer for their aid package. The minister said that about half the money will be found in savings from the short gulf war.

Why could that money not have been found earlier? That war ended nine months ago. The money sat there. The government dithered while farmers suffered. I think that this minister owes Canadian farmers an explanation.

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, first of all, the member's memory or his timing is out. As he is fully aware, the gulf war has continued for a considerable period of time, even to this point today as Canadian servicemen and women are serving in that area.

I would put a question to the hon. member, as reporters put to his colleague from the Liberal Party yesterday: Is he prepared to suggest that the government should have raised taxes to find the additional money that he believes farmers should have today?

We have tried to be fiscally responsible and put forward half, 55 per cent approximately, of the dollars that we have today, and will put forward the balance before seeding next year.

• (1150)

I can assure the hon. member that no one has suggested to me that we should have raised taxes to provide that money.

Mr. John Harvard (Winnipeg St. James): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary for the same minister.

While the government takes its sweet time with the farm aid package, there might be another way of helping farmers. The world wheat price might be strengthening. Wheat prices went up to \$3.67 a bushel U.S. on the Chicago Board of Trade this week. That is more than \$4 Canadian a bushel. That is more than twice the initial price offered by the government.

I would like to know from this minister whether he would consider increasing the initial wheat price payment.

Hon. Bill McKnight (Minister of Agriculture): The hon. member should be very wary of quoting the Chicago Board of Trade prices and equating them to what the Canadian Wheat Board is acquiring at this time.

He could also look at some other market areas, particularly the Rotterdam quotes on a daily basis. There is no doubt that the price of grain has strengthened. One of the reasons it strengthened is the Prime Minister's announcement of the \$500 million credit to the Soviet Union to allow it to make a purchase of some four million tonnes which will be delivered before the end of February which again will put dollars in farmers' pockets.

You know, Madam Speaker, as every other member in this House knows that the Canadian Wheat Board advises the government as to what the initial price should be. We have, in the past, made interim adjustments and when that advice comes from the board for interim adjustment, it will be acted upon very rapidly.

Hon. members should also be aware that when the government set on the advice of the Wheat Board initial prices which were higher than the market, the government continued to support those prices. That led to a deficit in the wheat pool of the Canadian Wheat Board which the government supports.

That means there has been an additional support system not for income but because of international trade war that took place.