

Oral Questions

If my hon. friend would take the time, we will take him through exactly what those are. What my colleague has said is that we, on a parallel basis with the free trade agreement negotiations, embarked on a number of discussions on ways that we can assist the Mexicans with the enforcement of what are widely regarded as very good standards of environmental protection. Their problems are enforcement.

So as my colleague and the Secretary of State for External Affairs have announced, we are already proceeding on an agreement and this will proceed. That is one of a number of things that we have done on the environmental side.

I would be happy to sit down, as I know my colleague would, to make sure that my hon. friend is well aware of everything that we are doing on the environmental side.

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TOBACCO INDUSTRY

Mr. Ken Monteith (Elgin—Norfolk): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

The export tax imposed on tobacco products has caused great concern for the tobacco farmers in my riding, the riding of my colleague, the member for Oxford, and the riding of the member for Haldimand—Norfolk. At a time when farmers should be concerned about seeding their crops, many are wondering if they will have a market to sell to at harvest time.

While this measure was implemented to counter smuggling of tobacco products, farmers in my riding fear that this tax will put them and not the smugglers out of business.

Emotions are running high on this issue. Can the minister tell me what efforts the government has made to ensure that Canadian tobacco farmers will have a market for their 1992 crop?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's concern and the concern of other hon. members. I particularly appreciate the fact that he and other members have made representations to me.

As the member indicated, the export tax was put in place to curtail the smuggling and the illegal entry of

Canadian cigarettes into Canada. I can assure the hon. member that it was never the intention of the export tax to be applied to legitimate exports of tobacco products into other countries. I can assure the hon. member that is the case and that is the intention. He can also assure tobacco farmers that the export tax was aimed at containing and smuggling and not applied to bona fide legitimate exports of tobacco products.

• (1450)

I can tell the hon. member that discussions are ongoing with the tobacco industry and I am satisfied that we will be able to resolve it in a manner satisfactory to the producers.

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POVERTY

Mr. Jim Karpoff (Surrey North): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

The recession continues to take the toll on the most disadvantaged Canadians, those who are unemployed and who are relying on public assistance.

This morning a report out of Nova Scotia documents that municipal welfare offices often arbitrarily disqualify applicants and violate the terms of the Canada Assistance Plan. Further, welfare rates for single people vary from 61 per cent of the poverty level to only 30 per cent of the poverty level.

Will the minister meet immediately with officials of the province of Nova Scotia to ensure that they comply with the Canada Assistance Plan and stop the arbitrary disqualification of people who need necessary public assistance?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I was informed about the matter my friend has raised. It has been raised in other instances. The Department of National Health and Welfare is investigating the matter. Of course, all the provinces have to comply with the rules of the Canada Assistance Plan. If there is a problem, Nova Scotia will have to be corrected.

Mr. Jim Karpoff (Surrey North): My supplementary question is to the same minister.