

Oral Questions

know the hon. member will want to re-check his facts before putting any further questions.

Mr. Jerry Pickard (Essex—Kent): Mr. Speaker, my facts are quite accurate. Here are a couple more facts for this minister and this government: Not only is the government taxing funerals with the GST and taxing the stamps that letters of condolence are being sent with, but the government is now depriving those on unemployment insurance and welfare by taking their cheques away, because they are unable to get them quickly, because the government is closing rural post offices.

The minister very well knows that citizens must have access to postal services. Will he take the responsibility required in his job and give fairness to all Canadians?

Hon. Harvie Andre (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is really stretching on that one. Those welfare recipients the hon. member is talking about will get a cheque on December 13, if the Liberal senators can be moved to take a decision.

Moreover, we have independent auditors to see that as soon as we mail the cheque, it will be delivered on time everywhere in the country, no matter where they live.

Third, Canada's postal service is second to none in the world, and we have independent experts to verify that as well.

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[Translation]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. David Berger (Saint-Henri—Westmount): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. There are about 500 furniture retailers in Quebec who stand to lose a full year's operating profits because they will not be adequately compensated for the federal sales tax included in their inventory. Yesterday, the Quebec Furniture Retailers Corporation claimed that this injustice would put a number of furniture retailers out of business.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister agree to withdraw the GST so as not to harm Quebec's furniture industry and the 21,000 people who earn a living in this sector?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member refers to furniture dealers as a whole. There are some furniture dealers who get a rebate that is equivalent to the amount of existing federal sales tax in their inventories. Other people will not get a full rebate and that, unfortunately, is what happens when there is an average rebate. Some people are below the average, some people are above the average.

But I would say to the hon. member, if he is really concerned about these furniture dealers, he will go down the hall and speak to Senator MacEachen and say: "We want to get this tax passed because the GST will result in putting the Canadian manufacturers of furniture on a level playing field with the international manufacturers of furniture".

Today, the international manufacturers are paying one-third less sales tax. That is why we want to get this sales tax through, to help those furniture manufacturers. But, if Senator MacEachen is still going to run the show, if Senator MacEachen is going to ignore Jean Chrétien, then there is—

• (1500)

[Translation]

Mr. David Berger (Saint-Henri—Westmount): Mr. Speaker, this is not theoretical. It is the truth. This morning, I spoke to the Vice-President, Finance, of Groupe Rona-Dismat, who said that implementation of the GST would have a very adverse impact on members of his group. He told me that some would not survive. Why is the minister asking the private sector to take such losses in the middle of a full-scale economic recession? Why put companies, jobs and the families that depend on them at risk?

[English]

Hon. Michael Wilson (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member was talking to the representative of the furniture industry, did he say to that man what the Liberal alternative to the GST would be? Did he say that no alternative has been suggested? Did he say that there is an alternative, that it is going to be another form of sales tax? Did he say that there is going to be an alternative of increased income taxes for companies and for individuals?