

Oral Questions

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Harper (Calgary West): I do not know what I did.

Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Yesterday the government acknowledged that higher than expected interest rates are impacting on the government's budget projections but he said that this would be offset by higher than expected revenues.

We know that higher interest rates are already impacting on the economy and on consumer spending. I ask the Minister of Finance whether he recognizes that continued high interest rates could slow economic growth and put off his revenue projections.

Will he produce new projections on all of these matters in September?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, what I will do in September is exactly what the secretary of state said earlier.

What I said in the budget speech is this. "The government will release a comprehensive statement that will clearly lay out changes in the economic and fiscal outlook since the last budget. Economic scenarios for the future will be put forward and the government's economic and fiscal goals and broad proposals and how they might be achieved in the next budget will be made public".

That was a commitment made in the budget and I intend to carry it out. I would like to congratulate the new member on one of his first questions in the House.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the minister has been.

[Translation]

Yesterday, the government changed strategies. It used to blame everything on a Conservative government that no longer exists. Now it blames a Parti Quebecois government that does not exist yet.

Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that the real problem is federal management and that a \$500 billion federal deficit is not one of the benefits of federalism.

I direct my supplementary question to the Minister of Finance. What specific effort will he make come September to convince the people of Quebec and the rest of Canada that his government will not bankrupt this country?

[English]

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, you can certainly judge somebody by their friends.

[Translation]

What we intend to do is precisely what the Prime Minister has said repeatedly. In fact, if there is something Canadians are very confident that we will provide, it is good government. We will and we do. And this will be made obvious in our statement in September. This is as clear as the fact that the real reason our debt is so high is because of irresponsible statements on the part of certain people that have caused interest rates to soar.

[English]

It is not only from Jacques Parizeau or the Bloc Quebecois that we hear responsible statements. As a Canadian, I take some exception to the leader of the Reform Party last week calling for a mini crisis as a way of solving our problems.

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[Translation]

TRADE

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères): Mr. Speaker, we are forced to recognize that since the Liberals took office, Canada's economic interests have been bumped around like never before by our number one trading partner, the United States. Quebecers and Canadians are hurt by this unacceptable and disrespectful American attitude towards the principles regulating free trade.

● (1445)

My question is for the Minister for International Trade. Will the minister explain why, after months of unsuccessful negotiations with American authorities, his government has not been able to reach agreements which promote the economic and commercial interests of Quebec and Canadian producers?

[English]

Hon. Roy MacLaren (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the reason is quite simple. The United States' demands are unreasonable.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères): Mr. Speaker, we have heard such hollow answers throughout the session.

Nevertheless, I want to put a supplementary to the Minister for International Trade. How does the minister explain the government's inability so far to put an end to the harassment and threats which Americans subject our producers in the dairy, poultry, softwood lumber, uranium, wheat and other sectors?