

Oral Questions

Nova Scotia Energy Agreement later today. He is not here now to answer questions about secret side deals. Why does the Prime Minister allow his Ministers to let their leadership aspirations take precedence over their parliamentary duties? Surely the minimum standard of accountability should be appearance in committee to defend the way he, as a Minister, spends public money?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member phrases her question in a dangerous way when she talks about letting leadership aspirations get in the way of parliamentary duties. She could look at her own Leader and ask herself why he does not discharge his parliamentary duties once in a while.

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ENERGY

PRICE OF GASOLINE

Miss Pat Carney (Vancouver Centre): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is addressed to the Prime Minister. We look forward to being before the Parliament of Canada and its committees on important matters such as the Estimates after the election. One of the issues we wanted to raise today deals with the petroleum compensation charge. We have evidence that gasoline prices are being kept artificially low until after the next election. Is the Liberal Government so indifferent to the spending of taxpayer's money that it feels it does not have to come to Parliament and explain this kind of glaring discrepancy?

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, when the minister of Energy, Mines and Resources proved unavailable the particular day the committee was sitting, I asked his Associate Minister to appear before the committee, which I am told he did. Therefore the committee members could ask all the questions they wanted. The Hon. Member is not complaining about a question not having been answered. The Hon. Member is complaining about the Minister not being there when another Minister was there in his stead.

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● (1430)

RAILWAYS

PRAIRIE BRANCH LINE REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. In his absence perhaps his Parliamentary Secretary could answer. I think the Minister is to be commended for the announcement made a couple of days ago concerning the Prairie Branch Line Rehabilitation Program, particularly as it affects Saskatchewan and the allocation in my own particular riding. People are waiting to see if the Government will carry

through with this program. There are, however, some questions that are as yet unanswered.

I am wondering if the Parliamentary Secretary could inform the House if the miscellaneous \$51 million incentive fund is meant to assist communities that are left off the five-year rehabilitation program because they were low on some arbitrarily drawn priority list, or if the fund is meant to assist in branch line abandonments by funnelling this money off to something like trucking subsidies to replace the branch lines that are in danger of being put out of the permanent network.

[Translation]

Mrs. Éva Côté (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Opposition colleague for asking me this question. I should like to remind him that we already have a \$520 million program for the rehabilitation of railway lines in Western Canada. It is a five-year program. The additional \$51 million fund which has just been announced will be spent for special programs which will have to be submitted to the Senior Grain Transport Committee. The particulars and all necessary data related to this new program will be readily available to the Hon. Member for The Battlefords-Meadow Lake.

[English]

PURPOSE OF INCENTIVE FUND

Mr. Doug Anguish (The Battlefords-Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, at committee the people from Transport Canada were saying that the money for trucking subsidies would in fact come from part of the money that was to go to the Prairie Branch Line Rehabilitation Program. The Parliamentary Secretary has said that some \$528 million is going into the rehabilitation program. As well, there is the issue of the \$51 million incentive fund. Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary could tell me if this \$51 million is part of the \$528 million, or if it is possible that the \$51 million is a special allocation above and beyond the \$528 million and is really meant for trucking subsidies.

[Translation]

Mrs. Éva Côté (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): To sum up the situation, Mr. Speaker, \$520 million have been set aside for a five-year railway lines rehabilitation program, including over \$300 million to be spent in Saskatchewan alone. The \$51 million we are talking about today is in addition to the amounts already announced and, as I just said, they will be spent for special programs which grain transport system users will have to submit to the Senior Grain Transport Committee.

With respect to trucking, the Minister of Transport is indeed quite interested in that question, and I should think that representations will have to be made to the special committee which is now considering the whole question of grain transport in Western Canada.