

Mr. Mazankowski: That will provide for a morning departure from Fredericton and an afternoon return from Saint John.

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● (1450)

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF BENEFITS FOR FISHERMEN

Hon. William Rompkey (Grand Falls-White Bay-Labrador): Mr. Speaker, I, too, am after an extension of a season. I hope I have as much luck with the Minister of Employment and Immigration as my colleague had with the Minister of Transport.

I remind the Minister that tomorrow is the cut-off date for unemployment insurance for fishermen. After tomorrow they cannot collect. The Minister knows that the ice blockade is still around the shores of Newfoundland and the coast of Labrador. It has been there for a long while. As a matter of fact, this is the third year that it has happened.

As she knows, there are thousands of small boat fishermen who cannot fish and earn a living. In view of the fact that this has persisted, will she bring forward an amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act to treat fishermen like all other workers, and prolong unemployment insurance benefits until such time as the fishing season begins?

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I want to advise the Hon. Member that I am indeed very well aware of the situation. We have been monitoring it on a day by day basis. We know that the ice situation has been very heavy this year.

I want to advise him that the final unemployment insurance cheques will be issued on March 21—

Mr. Lapierre: March 21?

Miss MacDonald: May 21. I want to advise the Member that we are working very closely with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to see what additional moves should be taken in this regard. But that decision will not be forthcoming for a few days.

SPECIAL FUND SUGGESTED

Hon. William Rompkey (Grand Falls-White Bay-Labrador): Mr. Speaker, can the Minister give us an assurance that if the situation still persists after March 21—

Some Hon. Members: May!

Mr. Rompkey: See what effect the Minister has on the House, Mr. Speaker. Will she ensure that there is a special fund set up, as was done in past years, in order to ensure that that income for fishermen will continue until such time as the ice goes and the fishing season can begin?

Oral Questions

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I realize that the Hon. Member and I are in the same category today, looking at March as May, but I want to assure him that I will make every effort to follow the situation in the next few days and I will make an announcement with regard to the situation by the 21st.

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VIA RAIL

CONSTRUCTION OF DOUBLE-DECKER CARS

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. The decision to replace VIA's outdated and expensive rail cars with new double-decker cars was made several months ago, to the applause of many. However, the workers in my riding who would be involved in the construction are still waiting for the contracts. The railroad groups and consumers of Canada are still waiting for the contracts.

Now, we find that the awarding of these contracts has been put on hold on account of the upcoming Budget, and these groups are naturally truly concerned that the hackers and choppers in the Cabinet will destroy this program like they have done to others. Will the Minister give us his guarantee that the Government will live up to its commitment and bring in the revitalized rail program that he announced in January?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Hon. Member that we are committed to revitalizing rail passenger service, and we are also committed to bringing in new equipment. The Hon. Member will just have to wait a little longer before a formal announcement will be made with respect to the ordering of equipment.

AWARDING OF CONTRACTS

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, is the Minister aware that the delay in the awarding of these contracts could well lead to layoffs during the retooling phase for the plants involved? Will he move to avoid this unnecessary hardship by awarding the contracts at once?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, yes, I am aware of all of those implications. Quite frankly, however, we intend to build the cars in Canada. We intend to spread the business throughout all regions of the country, at least to the extent that that is possible. Taking those matters into account, it requires a certain amount of preliminary work before the orders can be placed. I am sure that the Member will not be disappointed when the final decision is taken.