

Oral Questions

My final question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. He looks as if he wants to participate in some constructive way.

All the premiers to whom I have spoken have told me something quite different from the statements made last evening by the Minister of Finance. They have told me that the Minister of Finance never, ever discussed with his provincial counterparts a formal proposal for provincial participation in the goods and services tax.

Does the Prime Minister intend to put such a proposal on the table at the First Ministers' Conference? Or is he content to move ahead with a proposal that will see Canada as the only country in the world with 10 separate retail sales taxes?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, if we continue with this federal sales tax, we will be the only country in the world that has a manufacturers' sales tax. We will be the only country in the world that through its tax system will deliberately tax exports to a greater extent than others and—

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Oh, come on, Mike.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, I ask the Leader of the Opposition to have some patience for the answer. We would be the only country in the world that penalizes our exports in the way that this tax does. We would be the only country in the world that gives our imports a tax advantage relative—

Some Hon. Members: Name one premier.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): I thought I responded to that question in my first answer.

What I said in my first answer was that there was one finance minister who has said all along that he was not in favour. At no time did the other finance ministers say that they disagree with the fact that, (a) we have to change from the existing tax and (b) that the proposal that we had on the table, the national sales tax, the basic structure of which has been repeated in the goods and services tax, is the right way to go.

It was quite clear to me that they did not have the sense of urgency, the need to replace their sales taxes. That is why we decided to move forward with the goods and services tax that we believe is absolutely the right way to go for Canada.

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Douglas Young (Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is of course aware there will be a very important conference on the economy on Thursday and Friday this week. We all know about the tensions that exist in this respect.

My question to the Minister of Finance is this: Considering the importance of this conference, and it is common knowledge that all the provinces are opposed to his proposals on the GST, is the Minister prepared to contribute towards a sensible and honourable dialogue with his provincial colleagues by withdrawing the proposed GST?

[English]

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what the hon. member refers to or believes is healthy. I think that the approach that we are taking to bring in a goods and services tax is a clear way to improve the health of this economy. That is precisely the reason we are going ahead with it.

I have made it quite clear that if the premiers or the finance ministers, supported by the premiers, can agree on a specific proposal, yes we are prepared to sit down and discuss that with them.

At the August meeting of the premiers and made no attempt whatsoever to even consider alternatives.

Mr. Young (Gloucester): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the government plans to go ahead no matter what. I would ask the finance minister to comment again on his statement last night when he said in response to a question, "There's basically one exemption and that's groceries".

My question to the Minister of Finance today is this. Is he prepared to commit on behalf of his government that when the Conservative majority in this House rams through the GST against the will of the premiers, against the will of Canadians, that his government will not impose a tax either on groceries or existing housing because there are a few other exemptions?

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): Mr. Speaker, that is a continuation of the line of questioning that he and his colleagues have been using since September of this year.