

Oral Questions

whether any legal difficulties are in the way of pooling those claims at the present time?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the legal difficulty existed only in relation to the ability to actually pay money into a pool, not in relation to entering into an arrangement. Progress is being made. I am confident that soon we shall have an arrangement which will allow an effective pool to operate and specific negotiations to take place. Those discussions are going forward and I am now in a position to enter into such an arrangement.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, is the minister suggesting the pooling arrangement will be made prior to the release of the report by the Ministry of Transport on its investigation into the crash, or is he waiting for that report? I would be curious to know if there is a connection there. If not, why cannot the pooling arrangement be made immediately?

Mr. Lang: There is no connection at all between those two things, since the investigation which we are carrying on has no direct bearing on any question of liability, which is determined in another forum. There are significant legal issues which have to be dealt with in creating a pooling arrangement. As well, there are complicated questions arising out of the British Columbia joint tortfeasors law and the like which have to be considered. The various parties have to consider any effect on their position caused by the arrangement they would enter into. That has been the source of the problem. I do not think there has been any problem on our part other than to simply get together on these difficulties so far as the various parties are concerned, and I think that is almost over.

FUNDING OF COMPENSATION POOL

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Transport. The minister has reconfirmed today in the House, as well as last night on the CBC program "As it Happens", that the government will continue its refusal to participate in the funding of this pool. In this connection he stated:

—we as a government cannot turn money over except according to some law.

Since that will have a direct bearing upon other parties participating, because it appears they are not prepared to participate in the fund unless the government, through the Ministry of Transport, is prepared to do so, has he again met with his legal counsel and considered a legislative solution to this problem? In addition, is he prepared to bring in an amendment to existing legislation to allow the federal government to participate in this pooling arrangement? I ask this question in the name of sympathy, compassion and humanity—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the people affected, I wish the hon. member would not ignore the answers I have given and come back to

[Mr. Johnston.]

the suggestion that there may be a problem in the way of our participating in a settlement of claims. There is no such problem. The only problem is in relation to doing so in a particular financial manner in advance of certain stages having been reached in the negotiations. I do not see that as a difficulty. We are participating. We are proposing to participate in the negotiations and we are proposing to enter into the necessary arrangements with the other parties so that settlements can be achieved and payments made at an early date. Let the hon. member recognize that there is no difficulty in that regard. If there were one requiring a legal change, obviously I would consider putting one forward.

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, it is quite obvious the minister is unable to clarify the government's position to the House. He was unable to clarify its position on the show "As it Happens" last night. I ask the minister if he will undertake to make a full and detailed statement on motions to explain the government's position in this whole affair and put on the record, once and for all, the position of the government and the manner in which it intends to proceed toward expediting a settlement of this issue.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how it can be made simpler than by saying we are prepared to participate in the necessary steps to allow a pooling arrangement to go forward and these claims settled.

An hon. Member: When?

Mr. Lang: An hon. member shouts "When?" The point is that there is a complex, legal consideration which enters into this kind of matter. It may be very well for one of the participants in the proposed pool to throw darts and rocks at this government, and for hon. members opposite to share in that in their partisan way, but the fact is that we are in a position to enter into the necessary arrangement. The legal questions are being dealt with and I am optimistic about the early achievement of a pool. I cannot say that beyond any doubt, because it depends on the participation of other parties. I hope hon. members recognize that. It is simple, and the hon. member should understand.

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HEALTH

HAZARDOUS CHEMICAL SPRAYS

Mr. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare: it relates to the increasing number of chemical substances sprayed in Canada these days. In view of the fact that some of these sprays affect people's health and in some cases even proving to be fatal, could the minister please inform this House whether it will be the policy of her department to ensure that it is the responsibility of manufacturers to prove and guarantee the harmlessness of these sprays to human