

Oral Questions

release despite the fact that many farmers are being denied loans for seeding.

Given this situation, what incentive is there for farmers to even plant a crop this year?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Western Economic Diversification and Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds)): Mr. Speaker, let me say again that the initial payments that we announced yesterday for barley actually increased from over a year ago. It went from \$85 to \$90 a tonne which is about a 6 per cent increase. Unfortunately, hard red spring prices went down about 12 per cent, not 18 per cent.

Let me say this very slowly. We have got to be honest with farmers and we don't want to alarm them any more than they are. All of the prices—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mayer: I don't hear a farmer over there yelling, Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mayer: All of the income projections that were put out last November were based on the prices that I announced yesterday. We sent out price information to every farmer in the country indicating that these were the kind of prices that could be expected. Having said that, we are having ongoing discussions with the provinces that are concerned about income. We had a meeting with our Minister of Agriculture and two ministers from the provincial government and myself on Sunday. There are ongoing discussions with the province of Saskatchewan and Alberta and Quebec and Ontario. Those discussions are under way with regard to how they best use the \$500 million that the hon. member refers to.

Mr. Rod Laporte (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, what rural Canada needs is not rhetoric but stability. My supplementary question is to the Minister of Agriculture.

While the minister is playing ping-pong with Grant Devine, farmers are not able to get seed money to put their crop in the ground. All the while the minister is sitting on his \$500 million. Why doesn't the minister get off his seat, get up in the House and make a commitment to the Canadian farmers that he is going to help them put in their crop this year.

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, that is precisely what this government did. It did it back on March 30. The \$500 million is there, as my colleague, the Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds, indicated. We had a meeting with Manitoba on Sunday. I talked to the Minister of Agriculture as late as this morning.

The discussions are going on with Ontario. There have been discussions with Alberta. All we are trying to do is to co-operate with the provinces and try to design a program that would be effective and that would serve the needs of the farmers to help them get their crops in. We are there and we are asking the provinces to get on board.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Nipigon): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of the Environment. Yesterday, Ontario introduced guidelines to address the immediate need for action on the dreaded zebra mussel which is infecting the Great Lakes.

Ontario is asking all fishermen to transport live fish in well water or treated water. Fishing equipment is to be sterilized with chlorine or be sun dried. Boaters are to remove mussels from the hulls of their boats before transporting the boats to inland lakes to try and contain the infestation.

Will the minister follow the lead shown by Ontario and do four things; first, allocate funds today for research and control? Second, instruct all users of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway to respect the Ontario guidelines. Third, join with Ontario to strengthen these guidelines and, fourth, to advise our American friends of what we are doing with respect to zebra mussels and ask them to join us in this crusade.

• (1440)

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, while we appreciate what Ontario is doing, we have not waited for the province to act. The Department of the Environment has devoted money to research projects related to this very important phenomenon for which we have great concern. We know that the zebra mussels were introduced to our waters by foreign ships dumping water ballast after entering our ports. My