

just to ask old age pensioners who endured the depression of the thirties simply to endure until things turn better? Is there not something specific that this government can do now to get immediate assistance to those who need it?

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, it is our judgment that the most effective action we can take now, in the interests not only of older Canadians but others, is to get strength back into the Canadian economy, including strength in the manufacturing sector, so that there will be the capacity to have the kinds of benefits that come from economic strength available to all Canadians.

I share the concern of the hon. member for the plight of older Canadians, particularly people on fixed incomes. I have already indicated to him in this House that if there are changes in relation to oil pricing, one of the matters that we will be bringing forward as either part of the package or part of the budget will be a measure to be of particular help to Canadians, including elderly Canadians, most seriously affected by the impact of those increases.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, when I asked the Prime Minister the night he reported on the first ministers' conference whether the sentence to which he just referred was an indication that there would be a supplement or an increase to old age pensioners, he said that I had misinterpreted it, that I would have to wait.

May I ask him if what he is now saying means that the government is considering some kind of a supplement, or some kind of an allowance to older Canadians so that they will not just have to endure to the end but that they will get help now to cope with the worsening cost of living that Canadians are experiencing under this government?

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I will have to ask the hon. member to await the details of any proposal, and that will be coming forward shortly. I should clarify for him, however, that we are not proposing an across the board increase in old age pensions or, indeed, in the supplement. We are looking at means related specifically to increases in the cost of energy, means by which we can help offset the impact of that cost upon Canadians, including elderly Canadians, who will be most seriously affected.

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● (1425)

FINANCE

HIGH INTEREST RATES—STEPS TO ASSIST SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Donald J. Johnston (Saint-Henri-Westmount): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. In view of the fact that small businesses in this country are being ravaged by these historically high interest rates, can the minister tell us whether he intends to follow through with the promises made by a number of spokesmen in his party some time ago, to the effect that tax credits would be given to Canadians investing in

the small business sector, and shares in the small business sector, and in this way alleviate—by providing equity capital—the tremendous burden being borne by these companies which have debt?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, there are already a number of provisions in the law for assistance to small businesses, as the hon. member knows. When the budget is brought down we will see what else we can do to assist small business, which suffers from high interest rates the same as farmers, fishermen and everybody else in the country.

This is a temporary condition, we trust, of higher interest rates. The best solution, of course, is to operate an economy and to get conditions so that interest rates come down generally. That is what we are hoping will happen. In the meantime, he will have to wait for my budget as to any other measures.

Mr. Johnston: Mr. Speaker, I take it from that answer that the idea of a tax credit for such investment, which was promised in the past, has been abandoned. My supplementary relates to the budget secrecy rule behind which the minister tends to hide. I wonder if he would give consideration to the report of the Canadian Tax Foundation to the minister of finance back in, I believe, 1977 to try to modify this rule so that we can carry on a more meaningful dialogue in this House during the pre-budget period.

Mr. Crosbie: Mr. Speaker, after the last 16 years it is certainly nice to hear that hon. members opposite want to loosen up on budget secrecy and secrecy in general. They were the paragons of secrecy. I am glad to see they have been converted. The hon. member should take nothing for granted, whether it is about tax credits or anything else. Take nothing for granted.

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[Translation]

TRANSPORT

INQUIRY WHETHER GOVERNMENT CHANGED DEFINITION OF "DOMESTIC" IN POLICY RESPECTING RENTAL CARS AT AIRPORTS

Mr. Pierre Deniger (Laprairie): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport and deals with his policy regarding car rental counters in airports.

Could the minister indicate to the House and the Canadian people why in his policy he saw fit to change the definition of the word "domestic" which covered companies such as Tilden, Holiday, Host, and to replace it with the word "Canadian" so as to include companies such as Avis, Budget, Hertz, Thrifty and Dollar?

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Minister of Transport): In answer to the hon. member's question, Mr. Speaker, we did take into