

● (1450)

FINANCE

SCHEDULED INCREASE IN SALES TAX

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. Part of the Minister's recovery program that reduced unemployment from 12.3 per cent to 11.7 per cent over a year was a new tax to increase the sales tax, and tax telecommunications. Does the Minister really intend to proceed with that tax in view of the fact that fewer people are working today than were working before the recession began?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I have answered the same question on several occasions, and I have nothing to add to my previous answers.

[English]

APPROVAL OF EXCISE TAX LEGISLATION

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Mr. Speaker, if that is the case, and bearing in mind that companies that are collecting sales tax have to program their computers—there is a great deal of work that companies must do—is it the intention of the Minister of Finance to press Bill C-15 through this House before we adjourn on June 29? If it is not passed by then it will be literally impossible for companies to change the organization of the collection of sales tax for October 1 as set out in the Bill, unless there is a special recall of this House. Does the Minister really intend to do that, or is he just fooling us?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this is of course a matter the Parliamentary House Leaders will have to discuss. The House is not going to be forced to do anything. The Hon. Member knows perfectly well that any measure adopted by the House requires the co-operation of the Parties. Thus, the matter is in the hands of the Parliamentary House Leaders.

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[English]

NATIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

APPROVAL OF PROJECTS

Mr. Jack Shields (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of State for Small Business. How many projects have been approved under the Western Economic Development Fund of the Native Economic Development Fund, the \$345 million which was approved over a year ago?

Hon. David Smith (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, after that fund was established we

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set up an advisory board. We wanted to consult with them in good faith. They established the criteria, reviewed the applications, and have now recommended, I believe, six for approval. I might add that most of those are in the Province of Alberta. They are in the final stages of negotiation. Once agreements have been reached, we hope to announce them very shortly.

TIMING OF APPROVAL

Mr. Jack Shields (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, for other Members of the House, that translates into none. That program was established over a year and a half ago, with \$345 million in funds. By the Liberal smoke and mirrors, native people across the country have been encouraged to put in thousands and thousands of applications to gain access to that fund. Not one project has been approved to date. That is deplorable. The Minister said there were six awaiting approval. When will those projects be approved?

Hon. David Smith (Minister of State (Small Businesses and Tourism)): Mr. Speaker, the proposals are in the form of agreements. We have to negotiate those agreements with the various groups.

Mr. Shields: When?

Mr. Smith: When they sign.

Mr. Shields: When are you going to sign them?

Mr. Smith: I have already signed them.

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RAILWAYS

PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE USE OF CABOOSES

Hon. Bud Cullen (Sarnia-Lambton): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Transport. Concern is emanating, not only from the United Transportation Union but from several municipalities, about the intention of CN and CP Rail to discontinue the use of cabooses. When dangerous goods are being transported through communities, this demands every safety precaution. Will the Minister intervene in the CTC hearing, or indicate to the CTC that it will not be acceptable to permit CN and CP to discontinue the use of the caboose?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the railways have not made any specific proposal other than to raise the question that, in the United States, a number of railway operations there have replaced the old caboose system with more sophisticated technology for the detection of safety problems. From discussion with the railways, I thought their intention was to raise the issue simply as a matter of negotiation with the unions during the bargaining sessions, and then they will have to determine what the acceptability would be under those conditions, leaving that kind of determination up to the collective bargaining system. At this time that kind of examination is best left to