

*Oral Questions***CROW BENEFIT**

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

On March 12 in this House I asked the Minister of Transport if it was the government's intention to pay the Crow benefit to producers as recommended by the National Transportation Act Review Commission and I was told that it was not.

In light of the agreement that the Deputy Prime Minister reached with the premier of Alberta on Friday where he said in part that the federal government will proceed with enabling legislation which will provide for a national solution, et cetera, to that very issue, is it now the government's policy to do away with the Crow benefit and pay it to the producer?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is mixing metaphors. There is a difference between doing away with it and paying it to the producer. I think most producers would want to see the benefit maintained. How it is paid I guess is a question for discussion.

We get this all the time from producers. They say: "If we cannot increase the price of grain, help us reduce our over-all costs". The member should know as a farmer that transportation costs from an elevator beside his farm to a hold in a boat costs about \$60 a tonne. In the case of wheat that is over \$1.50 a bushel. What we are doing is looking at over-all costs, the Crow benefit being one of them, to see if we can do it in a way that reduces farmers' costs and help them stay in business.

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport said there had been no policy decision made on that. We did not get a clear message from the Minister of Agriculture, but we do have a signed statement that was issued as a result of the meeting between the Deputy Prime Minister and the premier of Alberta which seems to make it fairly clear that the government policy has changed. It has made up its mind.

I want to know if the policy which said that this decision would not become final until all of the provinces had agreed has now been abandoned as well. Is the government going to make agreements with one province at a time and get to the solution that way?

Hon. Charles Mayer (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, let me read the full paragraph that the member

started: "The federal government will proceed with enabling legislation which will provide for a national solution which can include provincial variations in design and delivery of the program".

• (1455)

Clearly what we as a federal government are trying to do is to take as many of the provinces' concerns as we can into account, get everybody to the table to seek an over-all solution and when the solution emerges hopefully to have as many of the individual concerns addressed as we possibly can. That is in the best interests of everybody. We want to make sure that the money that is put up by federal taxpayers is used in the best possible way to keep producers' costs down.

As a farmer who is a long way from any ports, either Vancouver, Thunder Bay, Churchill or Prince Rupert, he should be in favour of that.

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[Translation]

THE DEFICIT

Hon. Lucien Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance.

In its February 1992 budget the government predicted a deficit of \$27.5 billion. Last December, the Minister of Finance acknowledged his failure to keep the deficit at the level predicted and that the deficit would exceed \$34 billion. Considering current tax revenues, many observers are saying that the minister will be unable to keep the deficit below the \$35 billion limit he had announced.

Could the minister give the House the assurance today that for once his predictions will be accurate and that the deficit will not exceed the level anticipated last December?

[English]

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I covered that in the December statement when I indicated that the December statement was necessitated by a dramatic fall-off in revenues as a result of slower than projected growth. We projected growth in the February budget of 2.7 per cent and that forecast was shared almost unanimously by all forecasts of independent analysts.