

Oral Questions

[English]

CONSUMER AFFAIRS

POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER INCREASE IN PRICES OF BREAD
AND MILK—GOVERNMENT ACTION

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. In view of the impasse reached between the Bakery Council and the Food Prices Review Board, and in view of the statement made in Toronto today by the Bakery Council that the price of bread will go up next month regardless, what steps does the government now propose to take to prevent any further increase in the price of bread?

Hon. Herb Gray (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I have just received a preliminary report, which is, of course, subject to further confirmation, and it is just the opposite of my hon. friend's remarks. I am working actively to confirm this today, and our action will follow in light of confirmed information we get today.

Mr. McGrath: By way of a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker, I might point out that the report issued today by the board indicates that its original findings were justified and that any further increase in the price of bread cannot be justified. That is a report issued today at one o'clock which the minister obviously has not seen. I ask him what action the government proposes to take to prevent any further increase in the price of bread? While I am on my feet may I also ask the minister what action the government proposes to take with regard to the finding of the board in respect of the dairy industry, and what steps it proposes to take to prevent a further increase in the price of milk?

Mr. Gray: Mr. Speaker, I do have the report of the Food Prices Review Board on bread and obviously I have read it more closely than did my hon. friend. As I said, I have received a preliminary report from the Bakery Council which indicates that its members do not intend to make increases beyond present levels unless they can make a case before the Food Prices Review Board that cost increases are such as to warrant further price increases. As I say, this is a preliminary report subject to further confirmation, and I would be happy to correct it if my information is incorrect. I think I would want to get firm and definite information as soon as possible today before giving further indication of the need for government response in this very important matter. In respect of my hon. friend's other question, the report to which he refers is not a report of the board itself but a publication of a study commissioned by the board. I know we would want to consider it very carefully.

PERIOD COVERED BY DAIRY POLICY—STEPS TO PREVENT
INCREASE IN PRICE OF MILK

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Minister of Agriculture whether he has seen the report issued by the Food Prices Review Board on the dairy industry in which it recommends a five-year policy instead of the present one-year policy of the government? If so, does the minister intend to act on it

[Mr. Trudeau.]

immediately, and what steps does he intend to take to prevent any further increase in the price of milk in Canada?

● (1440)

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member reads the House of Commons reports from day to day to find out what goes on here. I said before that we were working on a dairy policy for ten years, not for five years. All I can say now is that I have read part of this report because it was just submitted today by the group who were asked to do it for the Prices Review Board, and I congratulate them for picking up some of the things I have been saying.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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AGRICULTURE

SUBSIDY TO BEEF PRODUCERS—SUGGESTED
ADMINISTRATION OF PROGRAM BY PROVINCIAL MINISTERS

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture. In view of the uncertainties within the beef industry with regard to the administration of the recently announced beef subsidy program, would the minister agree to have the ministers of agriculture of the various provinces administer this program for the producers in their provinces?

Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture): Mr. Speaker, I think that the uncertainty is rapidly disappearing. I do not doubt the capabilities of the provincial ministers of agriculture, but to make this a really national plan and to make it work in that way I think it has to be administered by the federal authority.

Mr. Towers: Would the minister clarify the statement he made that there is a possibility of the return of the surtax? Would he tell us his opinion on this?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, in the statement I made concerning the beef industry I said that so far as I was concerned it was important that the producers get a proper return, and that the beef subsidy program we have put into effect does just that. It gives them this return and also maintains a fair price to the consumer. Until it can be proven we are not accomplishing this, we will not change our program.

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AIR TRANSPORT

REQUEST FOR DISCOUNT FARES FOR HANDICAPPED

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a question to the Minister of Transport. Having regard to the fact that the young and people over 65 years of age get discount rates on air fares, will the minister give consideration to extending the same privilege to the handicapped who, I am quite sure, need it even more than those in the other two categories?