

Oral Questions

cost alternatives to hospital care in the various provinces so that Canadians will all be well covered with regard to the care they need at a price the country can afford. These discussions are under way. As I said, in a previous reply, my officials will be meeting with provincial officials in March. I hope to then be in a position to call a federal-provincial conference of health ministers in April.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE**CONTRACT FOR LONG-RANGE PATROL AIRCRAFT—REQUEST FOR STATEMENT ON NEGOTIATIONS FOR COMPLETION**

Mr. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask the Minister of National Defence whether he will be making a statement on motions today or tomorrow to explain his complete reversal of position on the long-range patrol aircraft contract?

Hon. James Richardson (Minister of National Defence): No, Mr. Speaker, I will not be making a statement. There has been no reversal of our position.

Mr. McKinnon: Is the minister seizing upon the difficulties of Lockheed to enable the government to back out of a contract under which the government found, to their surprise, that they were expected to pay part of the production costs for the planes they were buying? With respect to the reply of the Minister of Supply and Services last week that the technical problems concerned long-term financing, is it not closer to the truth that the technical problems are actually short-term financing and that it is the Canadian government and not Lockheed that is unwilling and unable to put up the front-end money?

Mr. Richardson: Mr. Speaker, at this stage it is the responsibility of my colleague, the Minister of Supply and Services as the purchasing agent for the government and National Defence, to complete the negotiations and contract with Lockheed. Those negotiations have been made more difficult as a result of the difficulties Lockheed has experienced in recent days and weeks.

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HEALTH**CLOSING OF HOSPITALS—SUGGESTED CONSULTATIONS WITH ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF**

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. It is supplementary to that asked by my colleague from Simcoe North. In these discussions he mentioned provincial authorities. With regard to the more efficient use of health delivery facilities, is he prepared to take into consultation not only the provincial authorities, the administrators, who are the same people as he has, but also senior nursing staff and doctors working in hospitals, and not necessarily only the doctors who put people in hospitals?

[Mr. Lalonde.]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that the provinces would look very dimly upon any attempt by me to go behind their backs directly to hospital administrators.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, the minister misunderstood. I asked that these people be included along with the provincial authorities so that some actual experience on how to efficiently run hospitals could be obtained right in the field.

Mr. Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I have had over the years several meetings with the official representatives of these professional bodies, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Hospital Association and the Canadian Nursing Association. In addition, I do not think the provinces would very much like the hon. member's comment that they do not know how to run these institutions.

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FOOD PRICES**STUDY INDICATING EXCESSIVE MARK-UPS—REQUEST FOR ACTION—POSSIBILITY OF PRICE FREEZE**

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. In view of the report of some 170 pages being prepared by Dr. Mallen for the Food Prices Review Board, the fact that the prime finding of the report is that there is a very high correlation between corporate concentration in retail food stores and excess profits, and earmarks where the excess profits are, what immediate steps will the minister be taking to eliminate those excess prices and profits in those specific markets?

Hon. Donald S. Macdonald (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I have already responded to that question from the hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Nystrom: In view of the fact the minister sloughed this off to the Anti-Inflation Board, will he now advise whether the government is considering imposing an immediate price freeze on retail food prices until they have time to evaluate this report and bring in any legislation the report might recommend?

Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale): Mr. Speaker, parliament set up an agency to deal with prices in Canada. It makes some sense to deal through that agency.

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AIR CANADA**CANCELLATION OF FLIGHTS FROM MONTREAL—REQUEST FOR REPORT**

Mr. Leonard C. Jones (Moncton): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Transport. Can the minister advise the House as to how many and why so many Air Canada flights have been cancelled out of Montreal today?