

backs, high interest rates or a combination of both. Is the minister aware of the tragic effect this policy is having on the Canadian book publishing industry and its employees—10 per cent of whom have been laid off already—and what contingency plans has the government to ensure employment stability within that industry and the survival of Canadian book publishing?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I have greater faith in the Canadian book publishing industry than does the hon. gentleman. My seatmate has already announced a policy to help the Canadian book publishing industry. As far as the high interest rate condition is concerned, that of course has its effect on all businesses. We are hoping for improvement as soon as our policies get a grip on the economy. I can assure the hon. gentleman that his worries and concerns are shared by the government, but we have more optimism for the future of the industry than he does.

FUNDING OF THEATRE COMPANIES

Mr. Mark Rose (Mission-Port Moody): Mr. Speaker, I will extend the minister's sympathy to the industry and assure them that we know that the government has a grip on that industry. My supplementary question is to the Secretary of State. Have any officials of the Stratford Festival approached him with regard to funding discrimination, and is the minister considering reallocating the \$10 million budget for the National Arts Centre in Ottawa to assist the smaller theatre companies across Canada, in general, and Stratford in particular?

Hon. David MacDonald (Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Stratford Theatre Company—a very important theatre company to all of Canada—the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations has raised this matter with me many times. I have had meetings with representatives of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres in an attempt to develop some long-term and positive policies with respect to professional theatres across Canada. I think we are making good progress in that regard.

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COMMUNICATIONS

PROPOSED CHANGE IN BILLING BY BELL CANADA

Mr. Bill Domm (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Secretary of State. It stems from recent discussions which I have had with Bell Canada and the CRTC that there is an impending likelihood that a study by Bell Canada will take place to determine a new means of billing Canadian consumers. My concern is that this—

Mr. Speaker: Would the hon. member put his question.

Oral Questions

Mr. Domm: My question is, would the minister use the authority of his office to ensure that this new study is not a means by Bell Canada to increase consumer rates?

Hon. David MacDonald (Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, the proposed experiment by Bell Canada of usage-sensitive pricing is a controversial topic and one with considerable implications in terms of possible increased charges to individual subscribers. Even though there has been no clear decision as yet on whether or not the proposal and the experiment put forward by Bell two months ago is acceptable, I will inquire of CRTC to make sure that there is no momentum given to this issue which would, in effect, contribute to a decision that would not be in the public interest.

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● (1440)

[Translation]

IMMIGRATION

ALLEGED WITHDRAWAL OF GOVERNMENT FROM AID PROGRAM FOR VIETNAMESE REFUGEES—CONSULTATION WITH PROVINCES

Mr. Bob Kaplan (York Centre): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Employment and Immigration, I will put my question to the acting minister.

It relates to the Vietnamese refugee program. Last week, when the Minister of Employment and Immigration appeared before the committee and announced the end of the Vietnamese refugee aid program, he said that he had consulted with his provincial counterparts, including Mr. Couture, the Quebec minister of immigration, and that they had given him their support. Mr. Couture denies that these consultations ever took place and he says that he is opposed to the withdrawal of the program. My question to the minister is this: Is Mr. Couture lying on this subject? Would the minister be willing to take his advice and restore the program the way it was?

[English]

Hon. Lincoln M. Alexander (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for that very important question. As I understand it, Mr. Couture was concerned about the fact that we not receive some 10,000 refugees which was the understanding of all the parties involved. In terms of who is telling the truth, I must state that I stand by the Minister of Employment and Immigration, who indicated that he had consulted with the provinces and they were in agreement with his plan, given the fact that the total number involved is 50,000.

As the hon. member knows, there was a recent release, under the date of December 6, which has now placed more emphasis on the private sector in order that moneys can be freed to assist those who are suffering in Cambodia which, in all, is still part of the refugee question. In other words, we had