

Inquiries of the Ministry

pal needs, and more in the same vein? I hope the minister was speaking for the government when he made that recommendation.

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for supporting the government's position on this general approach, Mr. Speaker, but I would not want to bind the government to the exact words quoted by the Leader of the Opposition. Certainly the government has always hoped it could find some way of discussing its actions in the cities with the people upon whom that action bears first and foremost. We are very glad that the position taken by the minister in Halifax has met with some degree of support from at least some municipal authorities.

Mr. Stanfield: May I ask the Prime Minister whether the minister was announcing the position of the government and government policy when he said he would seek the views of the provinces on whether they would be agreeable to the establishment under a formal framework of an urban council where the political representatives of all three levels of government could meet and discuss urban policies regularly?

Mr. Trudeau: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The idea of an urban council was discussed by the minister with his cabinet colleagues, and this idea was approved. It is a matter for implementation and for agreement, which the minister is presently seeking.

Mr. Stanfield: Is it the intention of the government to establish a department of urban affairs in order to administer the federal end of this program that the minister announced?

Mr. Trudeau: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are not obsessed with the name of any such agency. We think that the minister is now dealing with the problem in a very adequate way. He has no department yet, but of course he has some supporting agencies such as CMHC. We will be looking in the near future to see if there is any need for further structural changes.

STRUCTURE OF PROPOSED FORUM FOR FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL-MUNICIPAL CONSULTATION—DROP IN HOUSING STARTS

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): I have a supplementary question for the minister in charge of housing, Mr. Speaker. In setting up this new urban council on housing, does the minister intend to set it up under a frame-

work different from that suggested by former Prime Minister Pearson, who in December, 1967, said that such a council would be merely a consultative body dealing with housing assessment and housing studies? Is it the intention to have a different framework for the purpose of initiating policies, dealing with financial problems, and so forth?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister without Portfolio): Mr. Speaker, I think the words already spoken on this subject during the question period give some indication of some of the ideas I have, but they are one man's view of the world. It would be incumbent upon us to start the consultation by consulting about that very point, that is, about the structure that would best serve the purpose that we all seem to be agreed on. In that light it would be part of my approach to the provincial minister concerned to see what their views would be.

Mr. Gilbert: May I direct another supplementary question to the minister in charge of housing, Mr. Speaker. In view of the serious drop in housing starts in the first five months of this year, amounting to a 50.1 per cent decrease in urban centres, is it the intention of the minister to make a statement on motions setting forth the government's policy and initiatives aimed at solving the housing crisis we now face?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, I will give consideration to a statement. I am concerned myself about the low number of starts in May. I think it would be wise if we could analyse the May figures in particular, which, among other reasons, were down as a result of some unfortunate construction strikes. One or two of the provinces, for good and legitimate reasons, have not yet been able to commit public housing funds allocated to them. This, however, is a temporary situation and will be improved upon. This does not negate the seriousness of the low number of starts in May. I am consulting with my colleagues and if there is to be any different approach to this matter I will be glad to mention it in the House.

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a supplementary question to the Prime Minister. In view of the government's obvious change in policy with regard to direct participation of the representatives of urban municipalities, is the wel-