National Health and Welfare. In view of the fact that the conference this fall between the minister and the health ministers of the provinces was set up prior to the announcement made in the budget and was therefore on an open basis, and due to the fact that that conference is jeopardized by the non-negotiable position now taken by the federal government, will the minister do his best to get this conference back on the basis on which it was originally called?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I see no reason why the conference should not be held as planned, to study the same topics that were on the agenda. It had been agreed that we would meet in the fall to examine the report of the officials who are now looking into the possibility of giving greater coverage to the services under the hospital insurance plan in exchange for the elimination of certain of the more costly services provided at the present time. Federal and provincial officials have been working along that line for months. As far as the federal government is concerned, it is certainly willing to participate in that conference in the fall.

[*English*]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I would ask the minister as a supplementary question if what he has now said means that the reports that the federal government's position at this conference is non-negotiable are incorrect?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lalonde: There is nothing that is non-negotiable, except that we have given notice that we intend to terminate the present agreement on hospital insurance five years from now. But we have five years in which to find a new formula for cost sharing. I cannot imagine that we should be unable to reach an agreement in that five-year period. In fact, as I indicated yesterday, I have reason to believe that we could reach one much sooner.

* * *

[*English*]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ATTENDANCE OF PALESTINIAN LIBERATION ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVES AT TORONTO CONFERENCE—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Claude Wagner (Saint-Hyacinthe): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs. Would the minister inform the House if he is prepared to give a statement on motions with respect to the participation of the PLO at the conference on crime prevention in Toronto next September? As rumour has it, this is a subject which has already been discussed in cabinet recently, and rumour also has it that a conclusion has been reached.

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm the first rumour, namely, that the matter has been discussed in cabinet. I can deny the second rumour that a decision has been reached.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

COMMUNICATIONS

CABLEVISION—POSSIBILITY OF FEDERAL PARTICIPATION IN APPEAL OF QUEBEC COURT DECISION OR DIRECT REFERENCE TO SUPREME COURT

Mr. G. W. Baldwin (Peace River): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Communications. In light of the decision of the court of first instance in the province of Quebec with regard to the dispute between the Government of Canada and the government of Quebec as to cable television, is it the intention of the minister and the government to recommend an appeal with participation by the federal government in connection with the course of that appeal?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Gérard Pelletier (Minister of Communications): I understand that this is the advice of the government's legal advisers, Mr. Speaker.

[*English*]

Mr. Baldwin: The issue is a very narrow issue, and it will take some time to process such an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, leaving the cable television industry in some confusion. While recognizing the problems of unilateral action in the Supreme Court by the government, will the minister review that procedure to see if some device could be worked out whereby, with some form of consultation, a decision can be reached fairly rapidly, in the form of the government going directly to the Supreme Court, as it is entitled to do under the provisions of the Supreme Court Act?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pelletier (Hochelaga): I am prepared to accept the hon. member's suggestion, Mr. Speaker, and to reconsider it very carefully. But I would also like to reassure him. I do not think the decision made recently in the Mont-Joli case, which deals with a minor technical aspect, is anything to shake the confidence of cable broadcasters in the federal government's jurisdiction.

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[*English*]

FISHERIES

WHALES—ALLEGATION CANADA SUPPORTED JAPAN'S REQUEST FOR AN INCREASE IN CATCH

Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Acting Prime Minister. In view of the rapidly depleting stocks of whales and the widespread concern for the preservation of this threatened species, is the Acting Prime Minister in a position to confirm the report contained in a telegram to the Prime Minister today that Canada cast the deciding vote at the international whaling conference presently underway in support of Japan's request for an increase in the harvest of whales?

● (1140)

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): No, Mr. Speaker. Not in the form of a report but I will make inquiries.