

Oral Questions

the former prime minister to appoint at least one minister whom the hon. member had in mind. He has my sympathy on that.

The hon. member asked a particular question about the future of the Department of Veterans Affairs. I can assure him, without any equivocation or qualification, that we intend to retain an independent and strong Department of Veterans Affairs as an independent unit in the Government of Canada.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**FOREIGN AID EXPENDITURES FOR COMING YEAR**

Miss Pauline Jewett (New Westminster-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Secretary of State for External Affairs. Can the minister confirm to the House that owing to inflation there will be, in real terms, a decrease in Canada's foreign aid expenditures this coming year? If so, can she indicate to the House why she continues to speak at international forums about the necessity of providing increased aid to those in need, while at the same time cutting back the real value of that aid?

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the actual figures for our aid program will become known to the House and to the country when the estimates are tabled next year. I cannot give the hon. member that information at this time. I can say, however, that there will be no fewer dollars paid out in aid to developing countries in the next year than there has been this year.

As well, I would like to emphasize that we have made recent payments to foreign countries such as Bangladesh through a new program of food aid totalling some \$40 million, and there have been new pledges to the Caribbean of some \$10 million. Then just recently there was a pledge of some \$15 million to Kampuchea to help meet humanitarian needs in that part of the world.

● (1440)

Miss Jewett: I realize there will be no fewer dollars. The point is that with inflation running at 9 per cent, and aid increasing at—probably—only 2 per cent, the real value of our aid is declining.

Can the minister give us an equal assurance that the increase in aid to Kampuchea, of which we all approve, will not mean a decrease in the other foreign aid which is provided, including that provided through non-governmental organizations?

Miss MacDonald: I can assure the hon. member that the attention and the importance we shall be attaching to the work of the non-governmental organizations will increase, not decrease, in the years ahead.

[Mr. Clark.]

SOCIAL INSURANCE**USE OF SOCIAL INSURANCE NUMBERS**

Mr. Bill Clarke (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for the Treasury Board. Can the hon. gentlemen indicate, generally, what his responsibilities are—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Clarke: —and, specifically, whether they include investigation of improper use of social insurance numbers? If so, I want to ask him what measures he is taking to prevent the unnecessary use of these numbers by government and by business.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of State (Treasury Board)): I am tempted to respond to the first part of my hon. friend's question by saying the information is classified. The fact is, the Prime Minister has asked me to take responsibility within the government for matters relating to bilingualism within the public service, as well as privacy and compliance with part IV of the Human Rights Act. I will be tabling legislation dealing with the Crown corporations' omnibus bill, and responding on behalf of the government with regard to both regulatory reform and the Lambert commission experts.

As to the second part of the question, I do, indeed, have responsibility for developing a policy on behalf of the government with respect to social insurance numbers. I expect that within a matter of a few days I shall be able to announce to the House the fact that the government will be following a policy very different from that of the previous government: we will be rolling back the use of social insurance numbers in the federal government to a very minimum—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Beatty: —and setting an example for the private sector—

Some hon. Members: Order!

Mr. MacEachen: Ten o'clock.

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[Translation]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS**INQUIRY WHETHER DECISIONS ON IMPORTANT PROJECTS IN QUEBEC WILL BE ANNOUNCED SHORTLY**

Hon. Marcel Lessard (Lac-Saint-Jean): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Supply and Services. In light of the meeting held yesterday in Montreal during which several federal and provincial ministers had discussions about projects to be undertaken in the province of Quebec and in light of the comments we heard last night from provincial ministers as well