

*Oral Questions*

● (1120)

SUGGESTED REARRANGEMENT OF SPENDING PRIORITIES TO  
STIMULATE HOUSE CONSTRUCTION AND RELIEVE  
INFLATIONARY PRESSURE

**Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Given the fact that there is excess capacity in the residential housing industry, and given the fact that the shortage of accommodation is in itself highly inflationary, will the minister indicate if he is prepared to rearrange the spending priorities of the government at this time to alleviate the critical housing situation and thus reduce inflationary pressures?

**Hon. John N. Turner (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, the priority to which the hon. member refers is the priority of the government. The National Housing Act has recently been amended by this parliament, and the Minister of State for Urban Affairs introduced his new programs. The hon. lady's concern was echoed yesterday by the ministers of finance who met after the premiers adjourned. They expressed that same priority, and I took note of it.

**Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands):** Given the fact that both the budgetary measures and the measures of the Minister of State for Urban Affairs have been in effect for some time now and we have seen a further decline in the housing situation in Canada, will the minister say what he is prepared to do immediately, particularly in view of his comment on April 8 in this House where he said that housing is an area which should receive immediate priority?

**Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton):** Mr. Speaker, there will be an appropriate time to respond to that question in more detail.

\* \* \*

## AGRICULTURE

POTATOES—POSSIBLE ALTERATION OF ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAM

**Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture. It relates to the government's assistance plan for potato producers announced by the minister the day after the House adjourned for the Easter recess. Since there were a number of elements which were not included in the original announcement which have since come into play, particularly the limitation of two carloads, which has created not only confusion among potato growers but obviously considerably depressed the prices in Montreal and Toronto, can the minister undertake—or would he respond today—to indicate whether there will be any limitation with respect to diversion of potatoes for livestock feed programs, something which is very important both in terms of livestock feed needs at this time of the year as well as the price of the remaining potatoes to be sold for table stock?

[Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton).]

**Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture):** Mr. Speaker, a further meeting took place this week with the ministers from New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, the provinces most concerned, and also with the ministers from Quebec and Ontario who also have this problem to some extent. A full announcement on the program has been made this morning—hon. members should have it either in their post office boxes or in their offices by this time—outlining in some detail what the program really does or what it tries to do. It amounts to the fact that there should be payments to people with 10,000 hundredweight of potatoes. We are concerned about some of the producers who we feel are speculating in the market and so on, but we are more concerned about those potato growers who have not sold any potatoes and are depending on that as their sole source of income. It is difficult to work out a proper program for the marketing of this commodity at this late date. We were not asked to do so until several weeks ago, and then it required consultation between the ministers concerned for at least three weeks before they obtained a consensus from their producers and processors, and we are hopeful this will alleviate some of the concern that they will not be looked after. The total expenditure we estimated will be somewhere between \$12 million and \$15 million.

POTATOES—POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING NEW  
MARKETING PROCEDURES

**Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont):** Earlier when the minister was requested by provincial ministers from New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island to respond with an emergency program now, the minister indicated very clearly that there would have to be a related agreement with respect to changes in marketing procedures. I wonder whether this matter has been covered in the press release—unfortunately, the press release is not available to hon. members at this moment—or whether the minister will be making a statement. I think it is rather unfortunate that such an important question has been relegated to press releases when the House was not in session and now, apparently, press releases when the House is in session without any appropriate statement on motions from the minister.

**Hon. E. F. Whelan (Minister of Agriculture):** Mr. Speaker, the agreement we were able to come to with the provinces was one which was demanded. Proper regulations concerning marketing could not be worked out because they wanted it announced by April 1. That is why we made the announcement without the regulations.

In regard to the other part of the question about a new system for marketing potatoes, we are working toward that end, but how quickly we will be able to come to that I do not know. They are desirous of having a new system. We are also, because we have helped them in the last number of years, I think, twelve times out of the predicament in which they found themselves. If they are not desirous of that kind of program, neither are we.