

give a detailed answer to the hon. member's question. However, I can tell him that it happens occasionally that positions are vacant and difficult to fill immediately, whether in Northwest Quebec or in communities located in the Arctic. This can have been one of the situations where some vacancies have not yet been filled.

[English]

Mr. Neil: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. It has also been claimed that provincial doctors visiting reserves have been asked to stay away by federal nurses. Will the minister clarify this statement and state what interim steps his department is taking to provide proper medical services?

[Translation]

Mr. Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I have read the same allegations as did the hon. member, and, as I said earlier, I am not able at all to confirm or deny anything in this respect, but I find it strange to read in the same press report that they complain about the lack of nurses while they say two lines further that the lack of nurses would prevent doctors from going there. Therefore, this seems to me at least incoherent or inconsistent within the same press report.

[English]

ALLEGATION ANTHRAX SPORES CARRIED ON IMPORTED WOOL—INQUIRY AS TO INSPECTION PROCEDURES

Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. In view of reports that the spores of anthrax have been brought into North America and Canada on wool yarn imported from outside this country, and in view of the danger this poses not only to the health of humans but also animals in Canada, can the minister indicate whether the government carries out any inspection on this type of imported material and if not, could he tell us why not?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I refer the hon. member to the news release which was issued jointly by my colleague the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and myself on February 12, in which we reported that spores of anthrax had been found in a certain quantity of the wool imported in Canada. I think that this was found as a result of inquiries and inspections by the inspectors of the departments concerned.

[English]

Mr. Yewchuk: A supplementary question. It appears that no routine inspections are carried out on these imported processed wool products, and indeed inspection of raw wool is only a partial inspection and that if raw wool fails to pass inspection the treatment of the raw wool does not include anything that would necessarily destroy the spore of anthrax. Are these procedures being reviewed and updated in the interest of the health of the Canadian people and Canadian animals?

Oral Questions

● (1130)

[Translation]

Mr. Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I will be glad to give serious consideration to representations of the hon. member.

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[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

GUATEMALA—EFFORTS TO LOCATE MISSING CANADIANS FOLLOWING EARTHQUAKE

Mr. Frank Maine (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, in the absence of the Secretary of State for External Affairs, may I direct my question to his parliamentary secretary? As many as nine Canadians, mostly in one group, from Guelph, Ontario, have been missing in Guatemala since the recent earthquakes began. Since their disappearance is causing great anguish to their parents and the public, could the minister consider taking special measures beyond those already being taken to locate these people and so end the suffering?

Miss Monique Bégin (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I can report to the House, to answer the concern of my colleague which is shared by many Canadian families, that special measures are being taken. We think, on the basis of telephone calls received from Canadians here, in Canada, the work of our embassy in Guatemala and the work of our special task force, that the total number of Canadians in Guatemala can be evaluated at 600. Of these, 460 have been located, if I may use that word. The Department of External Affairs is maintaining communication with families to the greatest extent possible during days, nights and weekends.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

PENSIONS FOR FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR—DATE OF STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I direct a question to the Minister of Veterans Affairs? In view of the keen disappointment which will be felt by many who are concerned about the fact that no statement was made yesterday concerning legislation respecting former prisoners of war, may I ask the minister if this matter is still under urgent consideration in cabinet and whether we may anticipate a statement by the minister before the end of February?

Hon. Daniel J. MacDonald (Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, yes, the POW matter is still under study, intensive study, by the way. I think, if the hon. member will look at the comments I have made over a period of time concerning the statement to the House, he will see that I said I hoped to be able to make one in two weeks. I still intend to make a statement after I have finished consulting with my cabinet colleagues.