

Oral Questions

probably the lowest for ten years, will the minister tell the House if he has some new program that will significantly increase housing starts for the rest of the year, particularly as we are approaching the busiest time of the year for house construction?

Mr. Danson: Mr. Speaker, when I have new programs to announce, I will announce them. I think it would be unreasonable to announce what we intend to do and have it held up by parliamentary committees as the last legislation was, thus creating uncertainty. When the market drops we expect to see an improvement and we will announce it at the appropriate time.

Mr. Broadbent: A supplementary question. Considering the serious need for housing in the country and the high and increasing unemployment, could the minister assure the House that whatever is done—and preferably before budget time—will have as its objective for 1975 not 210,000 housing starts but a minimum of 400,000?

● (1420)

Mr. Danson: Mr. Speaker, we are going to work within the realm of reality and realism.

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[Translation]

SOCIAL SECURITY**SOCIAL WELFARE—CONSULTATION WITH QUEBEC ON AMOUNTS TO BE PAID**

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

As the Quebec Minister of Social Affairs is in the process of revising the standards to be used in determining the amount of assistance to be paid monthly in the future to the needy in that province, and as the federal government pays part of this payment, can the minister tell us whether he has had consultations with his opposite number in Quebec in this regard, and can he give the House some information on the whole matter?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, it may be that my officials have had consultations, but I have not had any personal exchanges with my Quebec colleague. However, a federal-provincial conference of welfare ministers is scheduled for next Wednesday and Thursday, at which time I may have the opportunity of discussing the matter with him.

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[English]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS**VIET NAM—REASON FOR EARLY EVACUATION OF EMBASSY**

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Acting Prime Minister. As members of the Canadian news media have had the courage and ability to remain in the South Vietnamese capital and are now our only link with that capital, and as other

[Mr. Broadbent.]

countries have left their embassy staffs in Saigon, and these staffs are doing their job—

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Hees: My question is, why did the Canadian government find it necessary to order our embassy staff to evacuate from that capital so early.

Hon. Mitchell Sharp (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we took the decision for the two reasons which have already been announced. They are: There was nothing the embassy could now do, if it had remained; secondly, there was the increasing danger to personnel. My hon. friend should bear in mind we would not want either of two things to happen. We would not want to have our evacuation dependent on the Americans. Secondly, we would not want to have our employees held hostage while we complied with the regulations of the new government.

Mr. Hees: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I understand the embassy staff of Australia are still in that country. If it is possible for the courageous members of the Canadian news media to remain in that country and have confidence in their ability to get out, why would there be any greater difficulty in evacuating the members of the Canadian embassy staff?

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, I think the situation is quite different because, as may be the case, members of the Canadian news media are dependent upon the Americans for their evacuation plans; but I, as the acting foreign minister of Canada, would not want to have Canadian officials in that position.

VIET NAM—REQUEST FOR ACTION TO AID VIETNAMESE MEMBERS OF CANADIAN EMBASSY STAFF

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): It's nice to have you back.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I need not to say how deeply touched I was by the message you sent to me on behalf of the members of this House, and the many letters and messages I received from all parts of the House. This shows me, once more, what wonderful comradeship the House of Commons always exemplifies. From the bottom of my heart I thank all hon. members who got in touch with me. It meant a great deal.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: Having said that by way of preliminary, I now wish to ask a question about something which is being discussed, namely, those members of the Canadian mission in Saigon who are South Vietnamese. One, two, or possibly three, come from the north and are North Vietnamese. Unless something is done on their behalf, they face almost certain extermination. Although there was plenty of notice that the situation was worsening, and although it was known that action would have to be taken, it was not. I now suggest that the Canadian