

Oral Questions

Mr. Attewell: Approximately 10 per cent to 12 per cent of the population of Canada is now over 65. By the year 2020, that group will jump to almost 25 per cent.

It is time that we made some long range plans for these demographic changes, not just in health care but in the whole question of improving self worth and living meaningful lives.

Does the Minister agree that there is a sense of urgency to this issue? Is he taking steps to develop plans to meet the needs of seniors?

Hon. George Hees (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Senior Citizens)): Mr. Speaker, I have been conferring extensively with seniors and seniors' organizations to find out their ideas regarding useful measures which could best be included in a program for seniors. I expect to be announcing such a program in the very near future.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

ACQUISITION OF NUCLEAR POWERED SUBMARINES— ESTIMATED COSTS

Hon. Douglas C. Frith (Sudbury): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Associate Defence Minister. I preface it by stating that the Liberal Party remains opposed to the acquisition of nuclear powered submarines for many reasons other than purely economics. However, with respect to economics, will the Minister explain to the House the discrepancy between the estimates his Department gave in June of this year of \$5 billion for the acquisition of submarines and the report by the Centre for Arms Control which states in their opinion that these costs are at least in the neighbourhood of \$10 billion?

● (1500)

The Minister's own Department has changed the original \$5 billion numbers upward to what is now estimated to be between \$7.5 billion and \$8 billion. Consultants to the British Navy estimate the cost of the program at \$11.25 billion. Would the Minister explain the discrepancies between all of the numbers, and which numbers is the Department now using?

Hon. Paul Dick (Associate Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I would be very happy to try to explain to the House and to the hon. gentleman. If he followed the democratic procedures followed in this country and in the United Kingdom, he would find that in the estimates of defence expenditures put before the British Parliament is listed the cost of the Trafalgar Class submarine. We used those same figures last December, this June, and again recently when the discussion came up.

The difference, translated into Canadian dollars, has been the exchange rate differences as the dollar has been going down and the pound has been going up. That is the only difference that has been going on.

There is an additional expenditure of which we estimated about \$2 billion for the infrastructure. We have been consistent on that all the way through.

REQUEST FOR TABLING OF DEPARTMENTAL ESTIMATES

Hon. Douglas C. Frith (Sudbury): Mr. Speaker, they have been using different sets of numbers, and I think they are attempting to confuse the Canadian public's mind. The numbers the Minister is using do not include the cost of training, setting up facilities on both coasts, Pacific and Atlantic, nor the cost of the recycling of the fuel which will be used in a nuclear powered reactor. Would the Minister table in the House of Commons the estimates that the Department is now using to acquire 10 to 12 nuclear powered submarines, the same estimates which are now being used as the Government debates the five year capital project plan within the Cabinet committee system?

Hon. Paul Dick (Associate Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Hon. Member that we are using the same figures in debating the annual review at the Cabinet level as we have been using publicly because those are the accurate figures for the construction and implementation of a submarine program. The fact that seven years later we may happen to recycle some fuel hardly is a cost which can be applied to the construction program. That is seven years later.

Mr. Speaker: I want to advise the House that there will be a question from the Hon. Member for Winnipeg—Birds Hill, followed by a single question from the Hon. Member for Fundy—Royal, and that will close off Question Period.

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EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

GUATEMALA—RESUMPTION OF CANADIAN AID

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. It concerns his impending visit to Central America. The Minister will know that many Canadians welcome the fact that the Minister has chosen to go to Central America, and we wish him well on that visit.

Many of the same people who welcome that visit are also concerned that the Minister chose, prior to his visit, to make a decision to resume aid to Guatemala, given the fact that they feel the situation there has not improved to the degree which would warrant such a resumption. Why did the Minister feel he should take this kind of action prior to his fact finding mission? Would it not have been better to have waited to visit Central America and to have arrived at a judgment after his