ing it. All we get is bafflegab, delay and secrecy from this government. As a matter of fact, the Mexican press got a briefing on the draft bracketed agreement.

I want to ask this question as one Irishman to another. Why is it that we get the blarney stone and they get the facts?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Well, the Mexicans had the choice of the Blarney stone or Barrett and they took the stone.

• (1430)

My hon. friend says that he called the Mexican Senate and they took his call. Hell, they would do that here.

I should tell my hon. friend that the President of Mexico called me at just about two o'clock.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Some hon. members: What did he say?

Mr. Mulroney: They are yelling "what did he say". He said, among other things, happy St. Patrick's Day and give my love to Barrett.

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INTEREST RATES

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance.

Today all five of Canada's major chartered banks made it official. Because of a series of increases in the Bank of Canada rate, all of them are raising their interest rates on mortgages by up to three-quarters of a point and the housing sector is just starting to get off the ground.

Does the Minister of Finance not realize that this new high interest rate policy will choke off any recovery in housing, or in the economy as a whole for that matter? Why will the minister and the Bank of Canada not backtrack on this new, unnecessary high interest rate policy?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member knows that it is market forces that are having upward pressure on the interest rates.

I remind the hon. member that we are still experiencing the lowest interest rates in 20 years. For example, while the five-year mortgage rate is, I believe, at 9.5 per cent or 9.75 per cent, 10 years ago in 1982 the five-year mortgage rate was 19.5 per cent. I think that reflects a difference in the confidence in a Conservative regime versus a Liberal regime.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Madam Speaker, the minister should recognize, as Canadians do, that interest rates have been going back up over the past several weeks.

Last month the government introduced policies to lower down payments and allow the use of RRSP funds for the purchase of homes. Now the government is putting the benefits of these measures at risk with these higher interest rates. Why does the government now want to effectively cancel these measures? Why is the government sabotaging its own policies supposedly aimed at helping this economy?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, I am glad the hon. member recognized the fact that the government has initiated some very important proposals to help stimulate the housing sector. That has resulted in an increase of housing sales of about 60 per cent over last month and over 17.2 per cent on the basis of a year ago. So I think that is good news.

It is also to fair to say that the market pressures and the volatility that is in the financial markets these days is something that we are all concerned about. I think, to some extent, it casts a reflection on the political uncertainty arising from the constitutional issue.

I think all hon. members would hope that we would be able to make progress in that because that would do a lot to improve the confidence in the financial markets and the over-all economic outlook for Canada.

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POVERTY

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Burnaby): Madam Speaker, a new Statistics Canada report puts a human face to the line-ups at the food banks; 40 per cent are children—700,000 children—10 per cent are college graduates and 22 per cent are high school graduates. That is the hungry human face in the lines at the food banks.

My question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. There is something dreadfully wrong here. Food banks are the only growth industry in this country. I ask the minister to stop talking about incentives for people to go to work. I want him to understand that