

guard requires an additional hovercraft and that the Bell Aerospace hovercraft made in Canada meets all the operational requirements of the Canadian Coast Guard, can the minister assure the House that the Bell Aerospace hovercraft made in Canada is being seriously considered for purchase by the federal government as the machine needed for Canadian Coast Guard search and rescue operations?

**Hon. Robert K. Andras (President of Treasury Board):** Mr. Speaker, I will note the hon. member's very interesting representations.

**Mr. McKinley:** A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Is the minister able to advise us whether or not at the present time Treasury Board and also cabinet have given approval for the purchase of a British hovercraft for the coast guard?

**Mr. Andras:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think I can add to my previous comment. If such a decision is made, it will be announced in the ordinary process.

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#### SUPPLY AND SERVICES

##### POSSIBILITY OF PURCHASING HOVERCRAFT IN UNITED KINGDOM—GOVERNMENT POSITION

**Mr. R. E. McKinley (Huron-Middlesex):** Mr. Speaker, may I put a final supplementary question to the Minister of Supply and Services. I believe that during the last two weeks a delegation has visited Great Britain and has included representatives from the Department of Supply and Services and contract signing officials. Were they there to look into the purchase of a hovercraft for the coast guard from Great Britain or were they there to sign the contract, and has indeed a contract for the purchase of a British machine been signed? If not, what were they there for?

[Translation]

**Hon. Jean-Pierre Goyer (Minister of Supply and Services):** I am going to inquire about it, Mr. Speaker.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### HEALTH

##### ARSENIC POLLUTION IN YELLOWKNIFE—REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION OF CONFLICTING REPORTS

**Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Can the minister explain the discrepancy between his public statements of 1976 asserting the harmlessness of arsenic pollution in the Yellowknife area and the evidence of Department of the Environment studies which state, among other things, that the public must be prohibited from using melted snow as a potable water supply? In addition, does the minister now say that the previous study referred to in the press release of October 3, 1975 was inadequate or erroneous since he stated on January

#### Oral Questions

18 last that a new task force is being established to study the arsenic situation in Yellowknife so as to determine what action should now be taken?

[Translation]

**Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** The answer to the first part of the question, Mr. Speaker, is that we have long been warning people in the area particularly Indian people, not to drink any water from snow thaw in the area of Yellowknife.

As for the second part of the question, the answer is no.

[English]

##### ARSENIC POLLUTION IN YELLOWKNIFE—MEASURES TO ASSURE NO CONCEALMENT OF PROBLEM

**Mr. Paul Yewchuk (Athabasca):** A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of press reports that certain officials in the minister's department have advised concealing from the Yellowknife public the risk it runs from arsenic poisoning, would the minister tell the House what measures he is taking to assure himself that there is no concealment of matters affecting the public interest, matters the public has a right to know?

[Translation]

**Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, the inquiry I made has demonstrated that no civil servant in my department had advocated concealing certain facts. I think we have been told about a departmental memorandum issued by a Department of Environment employee, with a suggestion to this effect; but here again, it is simply the opinion of a junior civil servant which does not represent government policy. The paper concerned has been submitted to the government of the Northwest Territories, and it is available.

[English]

##### ARSENIC POLLUTION IN YELLOWKNIFE—ACCEPTABILITY OF MEMBERS OF TASK FORCE

**Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories):** Mr. Speaker, I too have a question for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. I should like to ask the minister whether he can assure the House that members of the task force which he announced on January 18, 1977 to study the arsenic pollution problems in the Yellowknife area will be acceptable to all parties concerned, especially to the residents of Yellowknife and area, steelworkers, those working in the mines and to Health Canada?

[Translation]

**Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, in order that this task force be totally independent and impartial, I have asked the Canadian Public Health Association to select the members of this task force. As soon as I receive the names recommended by the Canadian Public Health Association I will make them public and the study itself will be conducted under the auspices of the associa-