

Oral Questions

Mr. Murta: Madam Speaker, it appears that what the Minister of Agriculture needs is not a big green cowboy hat but a big green muzzle to keep him quiet.

FARM CREDIT CORPORATION LOANS

Mr. Jack Murta (Lisgar): Madam Speaker, on Monday, June 1, in a letter to the editor of the *Ottawa Citizen* once again that other economic minister, the Minister of Agriculture, stated, and I quote:

I am also considering changing the lending policy of the Farm Credit Corporation by instituting a moratorium for three years on payments of interest and principal on corporation loans.

Can the Minister of Finance confirm whether this is government policy? It was in the newspaper under the name of the Minister of Agriculture in a letter to the editor. If this is government policy—and obviously it would be welcomed by the agricultural community—could the Minister of Finance indicate when this change may take place?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, if I understand the quotation read by the hon. member correctly, it said that the Minister of Agriculture was considering such proposals. That is fine. When they become government policy, they will be announced in the House.

Mr. Clark: By Marc Lalonde.

Mr. MacEachen: I am delighted that the Minister of Agriculture is discharging his responsibilities and taking, as he always does, a sensitive attitude toward the problems of farmers. I doubt if there is any farmer in the country who would share the rather insulting description given of the Minister of Agriculture by the hon. member for St. John's West earlier in the Question Period.

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HOUSING

MEETING OF FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL MINISTERS—
GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the minister responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Provincial housing ministers stated the following this week after a two-day meeting with the minister:

Mr. Cosgrove failed to make any commitment with regard to the future role that the federal government would play in resolving the serious housing problems facing Canadians today.

Since the minister has stated for many months that this was to be a major decision-making meeting to do something about affordability and about housing problems in Canada, will the minister report to the House today on what proposals he took to that meeting as the senior minister who is responsible for housing solutions in Canada?

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Madam Speaker, unfortunately the release which the hon. member has referred to was issued by the ministers prior to the completion of the conference, and I think that, for example, they had not had time to consider, in concert with CMHC officials and myself, such issues as the year for the handicapped when, with a number of housing officials, we agreed upon a number of specific steps that the federal government, together with the provincial governments, municipalities and some private agencies in this country, will be taking toward addressing such problems as those of the handicapped. I use that as one example, but there are many others. I suspect that is why we saw five of the ministers join together and observe Question Period when the conference ended.

● (1425)

ACTION TO CONTROL MORTGAGE INTEREST RATES

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Madam Speaker, I asked the minister what proposals he took to these meetings to solve Canada's housing problems, and I assume his answer means he took none. The provincial housing ministers condemned the federal government because it is not taking any action against the amoral interest rates, particularly mortgage interest rates, which are up again today, and they also indicated they would welcome the creation of a fund through Canadian banks that would reduce the cost of mortgages and hold mortgage rates at a set amount. I therefore ask the minister will he take this matter to the cabinet and aggressively push for controlled mortgage interest rates?

Hon. Paul J. Cosgrove (Minister of Public Works): Madam Speaker, the hon. member does not give the source for the assumptions in her last question. I think I should take the opportunity of advising her and other members of the House that, on the contrary, the provincial ministers did express an appreciation for the initiatives of the federal government. For example, introducing the MURB provisions—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Cosgrove:—for example, in introducing 5,000 social housing starts last year, and in supporting increases through the rehabilitation program. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, these programs they felt perhaps were not adequate, notwithstanding the increase in housing starts last month at an annual rate of more than 200,000. However, I asked them, what programs, what initiatives, what things are you as provinces going to do in response to the initiatives of the federal government?

An hon. Member: And there were none.

REQUEST THAT MORTGAGE RATES BE PEGGED

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview-Greenwood): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Minister of Finance. Contrary to what the Minister of Public Works has just told the House, housing starts in May are down dramatically and