

now prepared to concede that his present grab bag of programs, including those in Bill C-46, will do little to alleviate this serious crisis? Also, are his plans to stimulate immediate growth and employment in the house construction industry in these winter months limited to those enunciated yesterday by the president of CMHC, that is, to plans which are a rehash of earlier, inadequate programs.

Hon. Barney Danson (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that the hon. member asked her question in that way, because our programs are indeed innovative and designed to produce a good deal of additional housing in the coming year. I only wish the House would pass the legislation before it and that our friends opposite would not hold it up, so that we could get the houses built which the people of Canada want.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Given that the drop in housing starts and lay-offs in the construction industry reflect the inadequacies of the very programs of which the minister speaks, and given that the recent figures released by CMHC showing that of the thousands of inquiries regarding the \$500 grant to first-time purchasers of new homes only 676 applications have qualified for approval—a far cry from the 62,000 the minister so confidently predicted—would the minister give immediate consideration to extending the program to first-time buyers of existing housing?

● (1230)

Mr. Danson: Mr. Speaker, the program is intended to stimulate the construction of new housing, not all that much of which starts in January. Nevertheless, there are parts of the country where it can start and the new program will enable it to start. The hon. member should look behind her. If the hon. member for York-Simcoe will allow the budgetary provisions to go through, we can then get on with the housing legislation. People are waiting for that legislation. The builders, lenders and purchasers are all ready to move as soon as we get through that legislation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): The minister did not see fit to answer the question. If the figure of 62,000 which the minister confidently predicted would qualify for the \$500 grant is so far off base, with only one-hundredth of that figure qualifying in the first month, what assurance do we have that his prediction of 210,000 housing starts this year is not similarly inflated?

Mr. Danson: Mr. Speaker, I put 210,000 as a floor for this year. We will target for more. We have to be realistic in terms of international conditions. If we relate the situation to that of our principal trading partner, it gives us great consolation because we are doing about 4½ times as well as the United States in providing housing in this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Oral Questions

MEASURES TO COUNTER POSSIBLE INFLATED PRICE SITUATION

Mr. Stan Darling (Parry Sound-Muskoka): Mr. Speaker, as a Darling I am certainly delighted to be recognized on Valentine's Day.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Darling: My question is supplementary to the darling of the press, the Minister of State for Urban Affairs. In view of the fact that housing starts in urban areas registered a decline of 49 per cent—from 13,506 in January, 1974, to 6,955 in January, 1975—and because continuation of this trend will undoubtedly result in a reduced number of available units which, when and if mortgage rates decline, will create an inflated price situation as far as existing units are concerned, will the minister inform the House of the measures he will take to counter the possibility of this situation developing?

Hon. Barney Danson (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to enter into this sweetheart arrangement with the hon. member. If he will read the legislation and the opportunity this gives to Canadians, particularly young, low-income Canadians and first-time home owners, he will see there are a lot of provisions in the legislation. If we could only get it through the House, into committee and on the books we could get to work building the houses. I know the housing industry is ready to build. Thousands of Canadians across this country are most anxious to take advantage of these programs. They are good programs and we want to get them on the books so we can get housing going.

Mr. Darling: I hope that out of the many thousands of houses the minister has promised for this year, a great many will be built in rural Canada and in small communities because we are the ones who are presently getting the short end of the stick.

Mr. Danson: Mr. Speaker, that is a very high priority in our plans. I appreciate what the hon. member is suggesting.

SUGGESTION GOVERNMENT PROVIDE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE UNDER RRAP TO INSULATE HOMES AND CONSERVE ENERGY

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of State for Urban Affairs. In view of the recommendation in Canada and the United States that in order to conserve energy there should be a direct thrust toward insulating homes, will there be any thrust under the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program with regard to financing in the coming months?

Hon. Barney Danson (Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, this is part of RRAP. In response to the request of the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, I am looking at further measures with regard to taking new initiatives to conserve energy in older homes as well as in new homes.