

NATO summit could be associated with that conference in the fall. But at the moment they are not connected.

Mr. Forrestall: The minister now appears to be telling the House that in the opinion of the government a meeting of the senior leaders of the NATO countries should not be held until there has been some disposition of the work of the security conference. Is that what he is saying?

Mr. MacEachen: No. That is not a firm policy. We are, as a government, concerned about further progress at the European Security Conference and we want to hang in there for a further period in order to improve this particular aspect of our international relations. The question of a NATO summit meeting at the present time has been dealt with by the Acting Prime Minister. While in principle we would favour a summit meeting, a question could be raised whether the timing—at the end of May—is appropriate.

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HEALTH

POSTING OF PRICES OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS—REQUEST GOVERNMENT TAKE NO ACTION AGAINST PHARMACISTS

Mr. Rod Blaker (Lachine-Lakeshore): Mr. Speaker, my question is addressed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. In view of the fact that two Montreal drug store chains this morning challenged the Quebec College of Pharmacists by posting price comparisons of brand name and generic drugs, thus, in effect, finally giving Quebecers an opportunity to do their pharmaceutical shopping on the basis of price information, will the minister assure the House and the Quebec pharmacists that his department and the government will not participate in any legal actions which would or might result in consumers of pharmaceutical products being deprived of this kind of price comparison and consumer protection services?

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, again this matter was discussed at the meeting of federal-provincial ministers of health in February, 1974. The federal government proposed the authorization of price posting of prescription drugs but the provinces were not unanimous on this proposal. However, it was agreed that we would pursue the matter further. We are not persuaded by the argument that price posting will increase drug abuse. It is my intention to see that the food and drug regulations are amended so as to permit price-posting. The new arrangement will, however, not extend to the advertizing of narcotic and controlled drugs which have a potential danger for abuse. I therefore do not intend to institute proceedings against drug stores which post prices in the current circumstances.

Oral Questions

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

INQUIRY WHETHER GOVERNMENT CONVEYED TO EGYPT ITS APPROVAL OF OPENING OF SUEZ CANAL—CANADIAN REPRESENTATION AT CEREMONIES

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the honourable and learned Secretary of State for External Affairs, coupled with my good wishes for the success of his African trip commencing tomorrow. Can he advise the House whether Canada has conveyed to the government of Egypt its approval of that country's contribution to the diminution of international hostility and economic hardship through the re-opening of the Suez Canal, and can he tell us whether the Canadian government is to be represented at the ceremonies marking the re-opening of this historic waterway? If so, would he like to take a political descendant of the great Benjamin Disraeli with him?

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Secretary of State for External Affairs): I thank the hon. member for his good wishes and his penetrating question which I should like to take as notice.

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HEALTH

ACCESS TO THERAPEUTIC ABORTION COMMITTEES IN HOSPITALS—POSSIBILITY OF AMENDMENT TO CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. R. Gordon L. Fairweather (Fundy-Royal): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. I admit it has been asked before in different forms by the hon. members for Halton and for York South, but I am trying to reconcile differing views within the cabinet. How does the government intend to overcome the inequities perceived by the minister in relation to access to therapeutic abortion committees in hospitals, and is an amendment to the Criminal Code contemplated so that there might be equality of access to what the minister in his statement termed semi-public institutions?

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Lalonde (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, there are no differences of opinion among cabinet members on that matter. I said that the provisions of the act now in force are known. Unfortunately the benefits of the act are not equally available throughout the country; the provinces are responsible for administering health services, especially hospitals, and there is very little the government can do to force an institution to take measures in that regard.

[English]

Mr. Fairweather: Does the minister not agree that a simple solution to this difficulty would be an amendment to the Criminal Code?

[Translation]

Mr. Lalonde: I do not believe so because the Criminal Code as it is now constituted allows the creation of therapeutic abortion committees. The Criminal Code is purely