

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 28, 1973

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL AFFAIRS

STATEMENT OF PRIME MINISTER ON FIRST MINISTERS' CONFERENCE—TABLING OF COMMUNIQUÉ

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 41(2), I have the honour to table the press release issued at the end of the conference of first ministers which took place in Ottawa last week from May 23 to 25.

Upon reading this release, hon. members will see that there has been considerable progress toward harmonization of federal and provincial government goals in several areas of mutual interest. For instance the federal proposal to increase family allowances while assuring the continuation of national standards and the possibility of amendments brought about by the provinces has received significant approval. This will be a major innovation in an area of shared jurisdictions of the two levels of government.

The joint revision of the social security system now has full approval of the premiers. Within the framework of this review there will be a special effort to safeguard and increase work incentives, while social welfare ministers will see what place is to be taken by programs of assistance to housing and manpower training.

There has also been closer harmonization of goals and programs in the field of regional economic expansion. The views of the provinces on policies related to industry and foreign investments have been very useful to the federal government. It was agreed that the next conference of first ministers will give these issues a high priority.

[English]

First ministers expressed the wish that matters such as these, where the question is not directly one of fiscal resources but rather of co-ordinating policies and programs in relation to national objectives, should be given increasing attention at future meetings. It was also proposed that the broad question of government responsibilities and fiscal resources should be considered at some other opportunity.

In the health field, there was a discussion in depth of the federal financial proposals which had been revised since the First Ministers' Conference of November, 1971.

I should emphasize that the original agreed purpose of this long exercise was to provide greater provincial flexibility in determining priorities, to provide incentives to rationalize the health care systems and to provide effective

services at reasonable cost. During the conference, the federal government offered to leave to the discretion of the provinces the expenditure of the \$640 million of trust funds. These funds form an important part of the over-all federal proposals and are designed to enable the provinces to improve health care systems.

General agreement was again expressed on the broad objectives of the proposals. A difference of view was evident even as between provinces on the basic question of whether the federal government should participate directly in the programs or whether, in such mature programs as hospital insurance and medicare, it should contribute by providing tax room to the provinces on some agreed formula. First ministers indicated a desire to study the proposals more closely over the next few weeks and to report their conclusions to the federal government. It was agreed that our proposals would remain on the table for the time being. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that a consensus will emerge around the proposals which we have put forward.

● (1410)

After discussion of the new federal formula for continued financial support for post-secondary education, it was agreed that the existing plan would remain in force for a three-year period commencing April 1, 1974. Further studies will be carried out on the sort of arrangement that should come into effect at the end of that period.

Mr. Speaker, the communiqué reports the substance of our discussion of the economic situation including the problem of inflation and its control. It also reports our discussion of the important problem of foreign ownership of land in certain parts of Canada, especially as it relates to recreational and agricultural land. We agreed to establish a joint committee to report on the legal, constitutional and land use aspects of the problem. The federal government made it clear it would not support restrictions on landed immigrants, or on Canadian citizens owning land outside their province of residence.

The communiqué also records our agreement to give permanence to the present secretariat serving the Conference of First Ministers and to make its services available, as desired, to other intergovernmental meetings of ministers and officials.

Mr. Speaker, the conference agenda covered a wide range of government responsibilities in areas of shared concern. I believe better mutual understanding of each others' goals and perspectives was achieved and important steps were taken to harmonize approaches to policies and programs in the interest of all Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to thank the right