

*Proceedings on Adjournment Motion***PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION**

A motion to adjourn the house under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

HEALTH AND WELFARE—MANITOBA—
OPTOMETRIC AND CHIROPRACTIC
SERVICES IN MEDICARE PLAN

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, on Monday January 27 as recorded at page 4829 of *Hansard* and on Monday February 3 as recorded at page 5046 of *Hansard* I asked questions about the inclusion of optometric and other paramedical services within the provisions of the various provincial medicare plans. In particular, I asked whether the federal government intended to honour its commitments to share in these plans in keeping with the amendment made to section 4 of the Medical Care Act in 1966.

When I asked my question on January 27 the answer of the minister was that he did not think there was yet sufficient consensus for this to be done. When I asked my question on February 3, with particular reference to Manitoba, the minister said categorically that the federal government was not going to share in the cost of optometric and chiropractic services being included by Manitoba in its medicare plan. One does not like to use the word "betrayal" very often, but I am afraid that is the word which applies in this case.

● (10:00 p.m.)

In 1966 when we were adopting the Medical Care Act we insisted through a very long debate that there be a provision written into the act whereby other services could be added such as optometry. In due course, an amendment was made. As a matter of fact, it was made by the government, the terms of which are quite clear, namely that there can be other services. The wording appears in subsection (3) of section 4 of the Medical Care Act which says in part "in the application of this act a plan established by any of the legislatures of a province", and I stop there to emphasize the words "a province" because that is the key phrase. It was not necessary to have a number of provinces; rather if any one province sought additional services this could be arranged by agreement between that province and the federal government.

Lest there was any misunderstanding about that interpretation questions were put to the

minister by several of us, notably by one T. C. Douglas, who will be coming here in a couple of days as the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands. He was then the member for Burnaby-Coquitlam. His question appears on pages 10764 and 10765 of *Hansard* for December 6, 1966. Let me read the part of his question which had reference to the amendment to which I just referred. This is it:

I take it this means that the governor in council, on the recommendation of the minister, can extend paramedical services in a plan in a particular province even though other provinces have not asked for a similar extension. In other words the minister would be free, under this amendment, to accede to the request of a particular province that wanted to add to the services which are provided under this legislation, and it would not have to wait until a majority or a specified number of provinces, indicated their desire to have these paramedical services included.

The question was clear. The emphasis was on "a province", by itself. A little later on the same page the then Minister of National Health and Welfare, the present Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. MacEachen) was equally clear when he said this:

Mr. Chairman, I think the construction the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam has put on the proposed amendment is correct, namely, that it would be possible for one or any number of provinces to admit any health services. I want to assure the committee that the amendment proposed is not a pious wish.

A week or so later the office of the Prime Minister, then Mr. Pearson, wrote to the President of the Manitoba Optometric Society, Mr. Roy Brown of Virden, Manitoba, and spelled it out to him that the amendment which had been passed to this bill made it possible for an agreement, and I quote, "between the federal government and a provincial government, to bring under the plan, at a later date, additional health services, including optometric services".

Thus it is in the act, that it can be done if one province requests it. The Minister of National Health and Welfare at the time made it clear that it was not necessary to wait for a number of provinces, a majority, a consensus or anything of that sort. In fact, the word "consensus" was not mentioned. The government is now refusing to honor its commitment.

The two provinces that are already in the plan, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, found that they had to include optometry. The doctors cannot handle the load. Manitoba, after assessing the situation carefully, is faced with the fact that it too has to include