(Text):

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, I would like the indulgence of the committee in order to make a brief statement of information to the house with respect to the Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act.

Hon. members may recall that early in the session I announced certain proposals with respect to vocational training, especially with respect to federal assistance for capital construction. I had hoped it would have been possible to have brought forward the amending legislation at this date. That has not been possible, but certain provinces would find it to their advantage to know what is in the government's mind with respect to this so that they could plan their own programs in connection with capital construction of training facilities. Therefore I thought the committee would permit me to give a very brief indication of what the government has in mind so that I will be able to advise the provinces accordingly.

As hon. members know, the Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act provides in section 4 for a contribution by the federal government of 50 per cent of capital expenditures incurred by the provinces on training facilities, until the expiry of agreements on March 31, 1967, plus an additional 25 per cent if these capital expenditures were incurred before April 1, 1963.

As hon. gentlemen also know, this program has made a marked contribution to the creation of student places, and under the program 138,000 additional student places have been provided. The government now intends to extend the period during which the additional 25 per cent will be available, and it is to the conditions under which this 25 per cent will be available that I address myself.

The government is proposing that the 25 per cent additional contribution be continued on the following basis: The highest per capita federal contribution approved up to March 31, 1963, is $480, which sets the top standard for the federal contribution on a 75 per cent basis. This happens to be the case for the province of Newfoundland. It is proposed that other provinces be allowed to meet this per capita standard of $480 so that the additional federal contribution of 25 per cent will be continued in each province until the per capita of federal payments in provinces have reached this standard of $480, or until the expiry of the present agreement on March 31, 1967, whichever is sooner.

Once the $480 per capita standard has been reached in a province it will, of course, be eligible for a continuing 50 per cent contribution to capital until the end of the agreement.

I thank hon. members for allowing me to make this statement, which will give me a chance to advise the provinces and tell them in detail the amounts each province may receive under this additional 25 per cent.

Mr. Fisher: Mr. Chairman, we are pleased with this announcement. The criticism that built up over the application of the Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act was really centred upon the proposition that some of the provinces got an inordinate advantage out of it because their particular programs happened to be geared to a quick expansion.

As the minister and the committee know, the province that felt it got the roughest deal was Quebec, and it was generally felt that Ontario got the maximum advantage out of the offer. Now if the per capita standard of $480 is applied it means there will be an opportunity for the province of Quebec to take advantage of these funds, and I think this is an excellent adaptation to the situation.

The only problem is that if it becomes a continuing pattern—if the original program had been set on a per capita basis—in some ways it would be unfair, just as I think university grants are unfair in that they tend to go to those who already have. When you determine things on a per capita basis it means there is not any flexibility for expansion or initiative. So, in sum, this seems to be a good corrective and a very welcome announcement.

I would like to ask the minister whether he has had any indication from the province of Quebec that this particular plan of a per capita ceiling is suitable to it, and whether Ontario made any other suggestions. I must apologize to hon. members of the committee who do not come from Ontario and Quebec for asking these questions, but I do know there has been a great deal of discussion on both sides of the question, and I would like to know what the minister has done in terms of consultation or liaison with the two larger provinces.

Hon. members might be interested in knowing that in the two ridings of Port Arthur and Fort William a total of six schools have been built, with a contribution in the neighbourhood of $4½ million or $5 million from the federal treasury. Therefore we are very appreciative of the program, and would like to know what the provincial authorities feel about the proposition put forward by the minister.

One thing we did not hear from the minister was any indication regarding possible amendments to the act, regarding the contribution the federal government will make in terms of the upkeep of the program, and