

*Inquiries of the Ministry***THE CANADIAN ECONOMY****INFLATION—IMPOSITION OF POSTPONED  
RAILWAY FREIGHT RATE INCREASE**

**Mr. David Lewis (York South):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs arising out of an announcement that the railways will institute a postponed freight rate increase on March 1. In view of the fact the postponement of that increase was one of many which were made at the express request of the government, will the minister take steps to persuade the railways not to institute the increase at this stage in that it would create a very dangerous precedent?

**Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs):** Mr. Speaker, I will have discussions with my colleague, the Minister of Transport. What we are concerned with is that any increase should be within the terms of the pricing criteria of the Prices and Incomes Commission.

**Mr. Lewis:** A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that these increases are going to be implemented on March 1, only a few days from now, and there will not be any opportunity for studying whether they are justified by alleged cost increases, what steps will the minister take to get a further postponement in order to assure himself that the price increases are justified?

**Mr. Basford:** Mr. Speaker, it would have to be the Minister of Transport who would answer that question.

**HEALTH AND WELFARE****NATIONAL HEALTH PLAN PAYMENTS FOR  
OPTOMETRIC SERVICES**

**Mr. Robert Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Some days ago I posed the following question, notice of which was taken by his Parliamentary Secretary:

Now that a consensus has been reached among the provinces regarding optometric services, can the minister advise when these services will be acceptable for cost-sharing payments under the national health plan?

**Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** I am not prepared to accept the terms of the hon. member's question that there is the kind of consensus that he alleges. In any event, at the last federal-

[Mr. Speaker.]

provincial meeting of health ministers it was indicated that it is very doubtful as far as the federal government is concerned whether we can entertain any extensions until all the provinces are in medicare, which is not the case yet. We expect hopefully that by the end of this year they all will be.

**Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys):** A supplementary question. I suggest that if the minister would check with the provincial ministers of health who were at that conference they would advise him there was a consensus. May I also ask whether it is the intention of the minister and the government to make these services available to the people who reside in the provinces which are now in the national health plan?

**Mr. Munro:** No, Mr. Speaker. No decision has been made in that regard for the reasons I have indicated. The position of the federal government was made known to the provincial ministers: until all the provinces were in medicare under the original provisions of the bill we would not be prepared to consider extensions.

**Mr. Muir (Cape Breton-The Sydneys):** May I inquire as to the reasons behind the thinking of the minister and the government that all the provinces must be in the health plan before supplementary services can be made available?

**Mr. Munro:** It is our view—it is certainly my view—that the entrance of all the provinces in medicare would be greatly enhanced if we kept to the original concept before diluting it with other considerations which are of a controversial nature in some provinces.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Before this develops into a debate I suggest we turn to another subject.

**FORESTRY****ESTABLISHMENT OF LUMBER MARKETING  
BOARD**

**Mr. Ralph Stewart (Cochrane):** I have a question for the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry. In consideration of the growing problems in the forestry industry which are reaching critical proportions, particularly in northern Ontario, due to an ever-descending price structure, is the government planning to establish a marketing board for lumber?