

Adjournment Debate

● (1810)

Third, transport management in the Winnipeg region and at Ottawa headquarters have prepared and supported a detailed proposal to build a new Winnipeg air control centre. Project manager, Ron McFarlane from Winnipeg gave, as an alternative, the division of the work load of Winnipeg controllers to Edmonton and to Toronto, and the relocation of Winnipeg controllers to those areas. What is the cost differential of constructing a new building versus relocating the Winnipeg controllers and associated equipment? What is Treasury Board's position today?

Fourth, does Transport Canada not have a proposed building site on Crown land and immediate access to detailed building plans from Edmonton, Montreal or Moncton? If funds were made available today, what is the earliest date of construction?

Fifth, since Friday, March 11, over 60 grievances have been filed with MOT relating to the asbestos problem, and more are being filed daily. What is the Minister's response to these health related complaints?

The Government has been aware of this potential health hazard at Winnipeg International Airport for some time. The threat is due to vast amounts of the decaying asbestos insulation falling from the ceiling, and contributing to air suspension of asbestos fibres. Scientific research has identified asbestos fibres as a serious health hazard and, in combination with cigarette smoke, the degree of hazard is increased approximately 55 times.

The Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) said that the prime concern is the health of the Winnipeg based employees. If the prime concern is, in fact, the safety of these individuals, then why will they have to work in these very unsafe conditions until 1988? I urgently request the Government to undertake immediate construction of a new air terminal administration complex.

The Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) angrily denied on March 4 that the employees would be moved permanently. He cut short a speech at the St. Boniface Hospital in order to clear the air. He said, "Any suggestion that the move of the air traffic controllers is permanent is an irresponsible fantasy." He went on to say, "Robertson doesn't know what he is talking about. Treasury Board doesn't make decisions, Cabinet does."

Let the Minister of Employment and Immigration convince Cabinet to build a new Winnipeg air control centre to clear the air.

Mr. Jesse P. Flis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Assiniboine (Mr. McKenzie) did not expect me to answer all of the questions he posed tonight in two minutes. I think the most important question to his constituents is the health related complaints and the 60 grievances which he has mentioned.

I would like to draw to his attention that, according to samples taken by the Department of National Health and Welfare, asbestos fibre levels are well within the acceptable limits in areas used by employees. It is recognized that employees have taken their own samples which appear to indicate higher levels. These discrepancies are being addressed. In one particular instance where it was felt that levels were particularly high, the room in question was given a thorough cleaning and new samples will be taken in consultation with the employees.

As a long term measure, Transport Canada has decided to remove the asbestos in the administration building, which is where the concerns have been raised. The present plan is for this work to be done in the fiscal year 1987-88. Had the Hon. Member been at the Standing Committee on Transport this morning, he would have heard the air administrator, in response to constructive questions and suggestions by the Hon. Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Bockstael), undertake to see if the work could be advanced.

During the work, employees may have to be temporarily relocated. If they are, they of course will be eligible for all expenses allowed under the relevant Treasury Board directive. As the removal was not planned for the immediate future, the need to relocate and the details associated with it have not been fully established. When they are, I am sure they can be made available to the Hon. Member on his request.

I would like to emphasize that there is no intention of jeopardizing the health or safety of employees. All reasonable precautions to protect them have and will continue to be taken.

● (1815)

MEDICAL CARE—CONTRACT TO MANAGE HAWKESBURY HOSPITAL. (B) QUERY RESPECTING MINISTER'S POSITION

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, on January 26 I asked the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) a question concerning the approval which the Ontario Government had just given to a contract signed between the District General Hospital in Hawkesbury and the Canadian subsidiary of American Medical International, the contract under which the corporation would manage the hospital according to profit criteria and, of course, in return would receive a share of whatever profits it could generate.

At that time I asked the Minister whether or not she considered the contract to be in violation of one of the five basic principles of Medicare, the non-profit administration principle. She answered that it was her understanding that it was only the over-all health insurance plan which had to be run on a non-profit basis, but that institutions related to the plan could run on a profit basis. Of course, practitioners within the system have traditionally operated on a profit basis, and we are not quarreling with that at this point in time. The question is whether or not hospitals ought to be run on a profit basis, and whether or not that contradicts the principles of Medicare.