

tions and where there is no public health insurance, for instance in states like Georgia, the Carolinas, etc.

Could this happen to us, and if not, why not?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, I doubt very much whether the current state of the Irish economy is due to that country's joining the European Economic Community.

As for the rest of Senator Gigantès' question, may I suggest that he make those points during the debate to be held on the inquiry by the Honourable Senator Everett?

Senator Gigantès: I never suggested that Ireland's misfortunes were due to the fact the country joined the Common Market. I was merely reminding the Leader of the Government in the Senate that he was mistaken when he said that all was well in Ireland. In fact, all is far from well. Senator De Bané made the point that despite their membership in the Common Market, disadvantaged regions have remained so, some examples being Scotland, Wales, Northern England and even areas in Belgium. And what about southern Italy, which is still economically depressed although Italy has been a member of the Common Market for quite some time. In Milan and Turin, the economy is in good shape, but in southern Italy that is not the case. Considering these precedents, how can the government claim that a free trade agreement with the United States will help our disadvantaged areas when this is not happening anywhere else?

• (1440)

[English]

HEALTH AND WELFARE

ALBERTA HEALTH INSURANCE LEGISLATION—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Gildas L. Molgat: Honourable senators, my question is for the Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations.

Recently the Alberta government introduced Bill No. 14, the Alberta Health Insurance Act. This apparently will provide for commercial insurance companies to issue policies for both medicare and non-medicare services. It seems to me that this is a contradiction of the Canada Health Act.

I would like to know whether the minister has undertaken, in his capacity as Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations, any discussions with the Alberta government. If not, does he propose to do so?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable senators, we have not received a written statement from Alberta. Our information is based on media reports and on some brief discussions with Alberta officials. However, on the basis of these reports and discussions, it appears to us that the proposed legislation in Alberta does not violate the Canada Health Act.

Senator Molgat: Under the provisions of the Canada Health Act, medicare services presently under that act—if I understand that act properly—are to be comprehensive and adminis-

tered by a public body. Is there not a conflict in what Alberta is proposing?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, the honourable senator will be aware that to meet the comprehensiveness requirement of the Canada Health Act, provinces must ensure all medically necessary services. The present Alberta provincial plan meets this requirement. There is no prohibition in the act against private insurance of medical services.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare is monitoring the situation closely and, of course, we would be concerned, as a federal government, if medically necessary services were de-insured.

Senator Molgat: It will be in order, then, for other provinces to proceed with similar legislation?

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, the Canada Health Act does not prohibit private insurers. In fact, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland provincial legislation is similar to the Alberta proposal, or so I am informed.

CANADA POST CORPORATION

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND—CLOSING OF RURAL POST OFFICES—GOVERNMENT POLICY

Hon. M. Lorne Bonnell: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Leader of the Government. On March 9 of this year, according to the *Charlottetown Guardian*—which covers the island like the dew—of March 10, it says that the Canadian Postmasters and Assistants' Association released a list of post offices to be closed in Prince Edward Island. One of those to be closed is one which is close to the home of my friend, Senator Macquarrie, at Borden. It will be closed in 1989. The post office in my home town, Murray River, will be closed in 1988, as will those at Belle River, Elmira and Freetown. The post offices located at Morell and Victoria will close in 1989.

Senator Macquarrie: Shame!

Senator Bonnell: That is my friend's home town.

It looks to me, honourable senators, as if we might only have one or two post offices left in Prince Edward Island.

Some years ago, when we had a strong Liberal government in Prince Edward Island—in fact we had Liberal governments federally and provincially—we used to have the mail sorted right on the trains and passed off at the station. Now they are closing out our little post offices. Next I guess we will get super mail boxes, or we will go back to ponies!

Will the Leader of the Government in the Senate stand up and tell us in this house that the Canadian Postmasters' Association is wrong and that these post offices will not be closed; that Senator Macquarrie will get his mail at the post office; and that I will get my mail at the post office for years to come in Murray River and in Victoria—not in Charlottetown?

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government and Minister of State for Federal-Provincial Relations): Honourable