

Adjournment Debate

In the 1950s and 1960s handicapped persons did not receive the priority they do today. Instead of suggesting we spend more funds to expand Mirabel airport, which is a white elephant, I think we should direct funds to a problem area like Winnipeg airport. Concerned citizens of Winnipeg point out that tourists arriving from overseas or from the United States are faced with long waits at the customs and immigration areas. Staff are often not ready for the flights or perhaps there is not sufficient staff on duty. These problems must be dealt with.

I am disappointed that I have not received a reply from the minister to my letter of September 19. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has been writing letters to which he has received no satisfactory answers. I hope the parliamentary secretary will give us some assurance tonight that some definite action will be taken. Never mind wanting to meet the objectives in the future; this is a very serious matter. There are hundreds and hundreds of people in wheelchairs attending this congress and they want some assurance that at least when they arrive in Winnipeg they will be properly handled. That will take a great load off their shoulders. As I say, there are problems with the hotels and other facilities around the city. I am patiently waiting and I ask the parliamentary secretary to please give us some assurance that immediate action will be taken in regard to this serious problem at the Winnipeg International Airport.

● (2217)

[Translation]

Mr. Charles Lapointe (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, as the minister stated yesterday, the long-range planning for Winnipeg International Airport will produce major changes which might not be complete or in place in time for the 1980 World Congress of Rehabilitation International. This does not mean however that nothing will be done by that date. Quite the contrary. Transport Canada is giving every consideration to accommodating handicapped people attending the congress in the most comfortable manner possible and to facilitating as much as possible their transfer from the aircraft to the terminal building and inside the building.

Unfortunately, details concerning the type of aircraft and the number of wheelchair passengers attending the congress are not yet available and final arrangements to accommodate these passengers cannot be completed until this information is available.

At a meeting of the Congress Planning Committee, held in Winnipeg on May 2, 1978, it was determined that 7,000 to 10,000 delegates might attend the congress. Of this total, it is anticipated that some 400 persons will be physically handicapped. In addition congress delegates will be using various modes of transportation including train, automobile and aircraft. This means then that they will not all come through the Winnipeg airport. Furthermore the majority of delegates are

[Mr. McKenzie.]

expected to come from Ontario and the United States and it is anticipated that many delegates will combine the congress with holidays and travel by car. It should be emphasized again that not all delegates are handicapped and of those handicapped not all will be using wheelchairs.

With this in mind, Mr. Speaker, a number of proposals are being considered for Winnipeg International. For those aircraft that are not able to connect to the terminal loading bridge, hydraulic lift vehicles can be used. They can be raised to the level of the aircraft door and lowered to ground level. The people arriving would then be transported to the first level of the terminal building. For those aircraft that can connect to the terminal loading bridges, and therefore the second level of the terminal building, a portable elevator can be installed which would accommodate wheelchair delegates as well as other handicapped persons such as the blind.

In addition to the above possibilities, adequate staff will be present to assist wheelchair delegates from the escalators, if they so choose. Special security and customs arrangements have been agreed to ensure the efficient processing of all delegate passengers. I must emphasize, Mr. Speaker, that until more information is made available concerning the number of wheelchair passengers, the proposals mentioned above cannot be considered as final. Again let me assure you every consideration will be given to accommodate congress delegates and no apparent difficulties are anticipated.

● (2222)

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICE—RELOCATION AND RETRAINING OF EMPLOYEES WHOSE JOBS DECLARED REDUNDANT

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, on August 15 the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras) announced a program of cutbacks which he thought could involve 5,000 positions in the public service of Canada which might be declared redundant. It is quite clear that not all of these positions are occupied but the people in such positions might find themselves surplus to requirements.

The Public Service Commission responded to this situation on September 22 with a priority clearance procedure. In brief, through the delegated authority provisions the commission said no new staffing would take place unless an opportunity was afforded those people who held positions that were declared redundant to qualify for the positions that were available. Staff associations have asked for a total freeze on the filling of positions from outside the public service during this period. The Public Service Commission has resisted this and so has Treasury Board on the theory that a total freeze is not required. Remember, we are talking about perhaps 3,500 people in a public service of over 300,000. It certainly should be possible with an orderly procedure in the ordinary course of turnover and attrition to take care of every one of these 3,500.

There is a concern that the way the policy is now being put into place is inadequate. I am looking at the November issue of the "Argus Journal" of the Public Service Alliance. They