

concerning the inclusion of optometric care in the national health plan?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Yes, Mr. Speaker. We have held discussions with the provinces, mainly on the subject of the new cost-sharing formula to replace the present hospitalization and medicare arrangements. This formula would, we believe, place greater resources in the hands of the provinces to enable them to develop a health care system more in line with their own priorities. One of the ingredients of this proposal was that in the calculation we would build in the cost of optometric services.

Mr. MacLean: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I should like to inquire whether we can be advised who are the ministers acting in place of the eight or nine ministers who are absent today but who are supposed to be here according to the unofficial roster? I am not taking into account the seven or eight ministers who are not scheduled to be here today. Perhaps the Prime Minister could inform us who they are and assure us that there is an acting minister in every case.

Mr. Trudeau: I will be glad to help the House with that information. The Minister of National Defence, who is visiting military establishments in Victoria, is represented today by his parliamentary secretary, Mr. Comtois.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chrétien is presently in Victoria where he is holding meetings with Indians. His parliamentary secretary, Mr. Sulatycky, is here today to answer questions.

As for Mr. Pelletier, he has travelled to Vancouver where he is meeting with representatives of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews and I think that his two parliamentary secretaries are in the House to reply on his behalf.

[*English*]

In the case of Mr. Laing—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have to interrupt the Prime Minister. I think I should remind him that he ought to refer to ministers by their official functions rather than by their names, and the same applies, of course, to parliamentary secretaries.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the question period yesterday I called attention to the fact that there were at different times between five and seven ministers absent who, according to this infamous roster system, should have been in the House. You have already acknowledged the fact, Mr. Speaker, that this roster is not a legitimate or formal document of the House. We find ourselves in an increasingly difficult situation in connection with the proper functioning of the House when ministers deliberately refrain from being present. I refer again to Standing Order 5 which states:

Every member is bound to attend the service of the House unless leave of absence has been given him by the House.

There has been a continuous disregard by the administration for the importance of this chamber.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Inquiries of the Ministry

An hon. Member: What about your leader when he was in Guadeloupe?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. May we have order, please? The hon. member for Egmont is raising a point of order. He should be given an opportunity to make his point. I am quite prepared to listen to him.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Yesterday we witnessed the unusual sight of one minister responding for three separate departments, I believe, and one of the newest ministers at that. Today we are unable to tell for which particular department a minister or a parliamentary secretary may be answering. This has reduced the capabilities of the House.

• (1500)

I say, Mr. Speaker, that in your position as senior officer of the House you should take it upon yourself to consult with the House leaders with a view to clearing up this very great difficulty, and seeing if ministers cannot be in their places to answer questions that are important to this country.

Mr. Speaker: The point of order raised by the hon. member has been raised before, and I have stated my position. It is obvious that any system that is not provided for in the Standing Orders is not, so far as the Chair is concerned, in operation. Whether certain ministers, all ministers or no ministers at all are in the House from day to day is certainly not the responsibility of the Chair.

So far as the Chair is concerned, the situation is that Standing Order 5 is operative. I am not sure to what extent it is respected from day to day, but it does not apply particularly to one side of the House or the other. Standing Order 5 does not apply to ministers as such but to individual members; it requires that all members should be in the service of the House.

In any event, I think much of what I am saying is somewhat theoretical and goes beyond the point raised by the hon. member for Egmont. As I say, the point has been raised before. I have reflected on it and have expressed my opinion, and I doubt very much that I can go beyond that. There are only a few minutes left before the end of the question period, but if hon. members wish to raise points of order I have to recognize them.

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order which arises from a statement made by the Prime Minister. I ask for the guidance of the Chair on this question: Under what rules or procedures is a parliamentary secretary allowed to function as an acting minister?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member cannot ask questions of the Chair. Other members of the House have enough trouble answering questions, and I do not think the Chair should be required to share in that difficulty.

Mr. MacInnis: A further point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was putting my question in the form of a request for a ruling from the Chair. The question could be directed to the Prime Minister. May I ask him under what rules or