

Constitution Amendment, 1987

and House of Commons. Professor Johnson is knowledgeable in this area, he has been a Deputy Minister in Saskatchewan and in the federal area, and he reminded the committee members and parliamentarians that a long, hard battle had to be fought to establish medicare. Some of the provinces fought this tooth and nail, particularly the Province of Ontario. Professor Johnson suggests that giving the provinces the right to opt out of shared cost programs, and receive full compensation without having to meet any national standards, will ensure that it will be all but impossible to reform our social programs, to institute a guaranteed annual income, or to undertake many of the other social reforms that are badly needed in this country.

Will the Hon. Member comment on Professor Johnson's ideas?

Ms. Dewar: Certainly, one of my concerns was the spending powers. For the first time we may even have strengthened our federal spending powers. In the Meech Lake Accord we are setting national objectives and not standards. Anybody who has evaluated programs in a variety of places, and I am sure that the Hon. Minister would recognize the same thing in looking at what happens in an urban setting versus what happens in a rural setting, when the Government becomes the instrument of delivery of programs the standards become very different. The objectives can be the same. We now have the ability to be able to set national objectives instead of standards.

That is exceptionally important for the simple reason that Canadians will begin to understand what values are being put forward when there is a national objective for a program.

For instance, if a child care program is to be accessible and delivered by a non-profit co-operative, or by a Government, there can be a variety of standards. But the objectives are that it is accessible and not profit making. Therefore, that national objective can be there. It could be very different in northern Canada, in southwestern Ontario, and on the Prairies, but the objective is there for the children. If a national Government wishes to privatize all service deliveries and it does not wish them to be accessible to everybody, it may wish to have a test for those people who are deserving, and those objectives must be stated. Therefore, there will not be that national program.

Certainly, in regard to the medicare system, Al Johnson validly stated that it was the Liberals in Saskatchewan who fought it to no end at that time. The Conservatives in Ontario were talking about the erosion of any type of health care delivery to people in Canada. It had to be negotiated by the federal Government and the provinces to be able to be implemented. At that time there was no ability in the Constitution to be able to set a national objective and to go in and do the spending.

It was the political will of the people that eventually brought it to bear. In that manner we achieved the health care system that we have today. It may have all types of warts and

problems in it, but I challenge anyone because I think it is second to none in the world.

That was done in our funny Canadian way. We look at things, compromise, and negotiate. Now we are looking at it and we have matured to the point where we are stating in our Constitution that the federal Government should have the ability to set national objectives. When it sets national objectives, the provinces must come along. If they do not come along, they do not become part of that program. Therefore, they do not receive the moneys for it. As a municipal politician, I certainly recognize that those are the levers that really work.

Hon. Alvin Hamilton (Qu'Appelle—Moose Mountain): Madam Speaker, it is very pleasant for me to be able to enter this debate following the speech of the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Ms. Dewar).

As one old-timer to another, we recognize experience and the necessity to be moderate and lucid. The speech of the Hon. Member today delighted me to no end. For those who have been around for a good many decades in the field of government, it is very clear to us that there is no such thing as a perfect law. There is no such thing as a perfect agreement, whether it is called Meech Lake or anything else. We can only do our best and hope that it is general enough to cover all the points. The Hon. Member clearly made the point that when one gets down into details, one gets lost and into all types of extraneous fights.

There is the feeling in the House that the new Member for Hamilton Mountain deserves the congratulations of those of us who are listening today. It is a good example of Parliament at its best.

I am ashamed to say that I am going to do what is called a "school teacher operation". In the question of Constitution-making, I belong to a generation that heard nothing else but. In the 1930s all we heard is how are we going to solve this terrible disaster that is upon us. There was not only a Canadian recession, and bad weather in areas of the west for 10 years, but across the whole country we heard about how we could cope with this problem. We had the tremendous royal commission report, the Rowell-Sirois report, after 10 years of study.

In the university class that I belonged to was a person who has been mentioned today, one of the ex-senior civil servants, Mr. Gordon Robertson. I have engaged in debates with him for 50 years. We both came to the conclusion that a long road is before us. He went through the Civil Service, and I went up through the political ladder. I was defeated seven times in my political career before I was elected, and you learn the hard way that you have to get along with people.

I wish to throw into the debate today a few observations that may help the people who may be watching this debate understand what is going on in their language. As parliamentarians talking about things we know quite a bit about we go