

Oral Questions

around which the Canadian Medical Association is conducting its campaign? I think it would be very helpful if we could have some update from the Minister on this matter.

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Can I first say on this special day, Madam Speaker, that my counterpart in the NDP is obviously far more elegant than the CMA. I am talking, of course, about his appearance.

It is a fact that the CMA has launched quite a questionable campaign on medicare, and I really appreciate the work done by many groups in the country toward saving medicare. The Member wants to know if we are working on this. The Department of Justice is drafting a document, the purpose of which is to strengthen the medicare we have always known, which is so liked and has so well served Canadians. I cannot say as much as I would like in the few minutes I have to answer in the House, but I will present that draft first to the provincial Ministers, of course, and there will be, as usual, ample opportunity for discussion. The purpose of the Act is to strengthen medicare, not to change the basic rules of the game as we have always known them. In that respect, the fears being spread around are not founded at all.

DRAFTING OF LEGISLATION

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Madam Speaker, the groups who are writing to Members of Parliament and the Minister are doing their job to save medicare. However, we have the continuing problem of extra billing. Because of unemployment we have people losing their health insurance, particularly in Ontario where they still charge premiums. We still have portability problems. Can the Minister give us some kind of deadline as to when she will be going to the provincial Ministers of Health? When does she expect that Canadians will be able to respond to an actual draft of the Canada Health Act? It is getting urgent because we have had this crisis in medicare on our hands for four or five years.

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, I said yesterday, and I will repeat it, that you do not lightly go about regulating \$8.5 billion, which is the federal share of medicare paid to the Provinces. I think it is important to take the time needed to get an Act better than the one we have. The consensus around this House is that we want to strengthen the Act and clarify, once and for all, the problem of extra billing in particular. It is not true, however, that extra billing is increasing. We are monitoring that constantly and it is at a stable level right now.

I have never heard that people in Ontario were losing their medicare because they cannot afford their premiums. If a Member knows of even one case of that happening, they should report it to me and I will be immediately in contact with Larry Grossman, my Ontario counterpart.

HAZARDOUS PRODUCTS

EPIDEMIC OF INFANT WALKER ACCIDENTS

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, notice of which I gave him about two months ago. The Minister will know that pediatricians across the country are alarmed about an epidemic of serious accidents happening to children who wander around in little doughnut-shaped walkers. They are falling down stairs and being paralysed. Because of their new-found height, they eat plants, pull pots of scalding water down on themselves, and so on. It is hard to imagine finding your kid at the bottom of the stairs half paralysed, but that is what happened just recently in Ottawa.

What method can the Minister's hazardous products division use to make young parents aware that they cannot leave children unattended in these walkers, in effect using them as babysitters, and giving freedom to a child which he or she is incapable of handling?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Hon. Member for giving me notice of his question well in advance, which means that I was able to make enquiries. In fact, my own Department, in collaboration with the American Consumer Product Safety Commission and the American Society for Testing of Materials, is now working on performance criteria for these walkers, in order to correct manufacturing defects and design problems that are a hazard to child safety. I believe that tests carried out by hospitals in recent months have clearly demonstrated that a hazard does exist for children, and the manufacturers, in consultation with the Canadian and American authorities, are prepared to correct the manufacturing defects of these walkers.

[English]

WARNING TO PARENTS

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Madam Speaker, I am aware of the very real value of getting the manufacturers, in particular, to co-operate, but I really wonder whether they are going to mess up a nicely coloured product by stamping on it some sort of ominous warning to parents. Will the Minister consider authorizing the funding of filmstrips or videotapes which could be distributed to pre-natal classes and hospitals to warn young mothers about safeguarding their children against these walkers and other hazards?

[Translation]

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member is aware that my Department's advertising budget is very limited. However, I shall certainly find out what can be done. I am very pleased to hear a Member of the Official Opposition urging us to do some