

*Supply*

**Mr. Joe Comuzzi (Thunder Bay—Nipigon):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment my colleague and my friend from Fraser Valley East for the very thoughtful presentation he made to the House. I am wondering if he would allow me to ask him several questions with respect to the comments that he just made.

Let me list those in order of importance. The question that I get constantly as I travel through my riding of Thunder Bay—Nipigon, where there are several hospitals and many senior citizen complexes, concerns most senior citizens. They worry about their personal safety and the delivery of adequate health care which they have come to expect from other governments in this country.

As a first question, I would like to ask my friend if he could unequivocally state to the seniors, not only in Thunder Bay—Nipigon but the seniors throughout this country, the question that comes to me on almost a weekly basis when I have the opportunity to get back to Thunder Bay—Nipigon, whether this government is going to do anything to jeopardize the delivery of health care services to seniors?

As we know, these people all live on pensions and they are sometimes in very frugal surroundings. They are concerned about the application of user fees in this country. They are concerned about having to go to a doctor and having to pay a fee. They are concerned about the availability of drugs which are getting very expensive. They are concerned about the user fee or a deductible portion that they are going to pay.

I would like my hon. friend, who has just given this fine treatise on his government's plans for the medical system in Canada, to assure the seniors in my riding of Thunder Bay—Nipigon, but also assure all the seniors throughout the country, that this in fact is not going to be a program that his government will entertain during its term of office.

The second and perhaps equally important issue that my friend alluded to in his remarks is that medicare has come to be one of those very important services that this government provides to all its citizens and one of the factors that unify this country.

I am certainly glad that the former minister of health is in the House. I am concerned that when we talk about what is going on constitutionally in this country, that we are going to separate the powers, that we are going to stop being a federal state, that it is contemplated to give

so many more powers to the provinces. I am concerned about this fundamental right that all of our Canadian citizens, especially those who are approaching the senior level, have to the availability of medical care and drug care that we have come to expect.

• (1550)

I am sure my colleague, who is such a thoughtful man, has put his mind to this. What happens if we become something less than a federal state? What happens to our medical system, our plans and what we have come to expect in this country? What happens to this very important facet of our daily lives should we become something less than the federal state, such as is being proposed in our country today?

**Mr. Belsher:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. friend opposite for his questions.

We have to think of what sort of controls are in the medical system now to prevent people abusing the emergency wards? It is strange that we should find that emergency wards in our hospitals are far more widely used on the weekends. I remember the hospital at home when B.C. was the last province to stop user fees.

B.C. had user fees in the system. In 1983 when the Canada Health Act was brought in, it said that user fees could not be used. If a province had user fees, it was penalized by the amount of money charged, which was held in trust for a certain amount of time. That money was lost if it did not stop charging user fees.

It was strange that as soon as the user fees were stopped, the use of in the emergency ward in the hospital at home went up dramatically in the following month. It was really strange that there should be a correlation between the user fees and that.

It was also asked by people in the British Columbia government whether we would consider bringing user fees back in. I said to them: "If you would bring that forward to the federal government through your health ministers' meetings and had a significant number of health ministers requesting it, then we would seriously look at it. Unless that was to come with a very strong mandate from a number of provinces, then we would not look at it."

The hon. member asked about whether or not we are committed to the delivery of services. Yes, we are. The hon. member can assure his seniors that we are as