

*Supply*

**Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North):** Madam Speaker, I am delighted to rise and speak to this debate. Certainly, I have spoken on this issue a number of times. I would like to now bring to this Chamber my thoughts.

On March 19, 1991, barely a year and a week ago today, I stood here on behalf of the Liberal caucus asking that this House reaffirm its commitment to medicare. My request was quite simple: "That this House, with all its members, reaffirm its commitment to medicare", which underlines the Liberal commitment to universal medicare. The government, led by the then former minister of health, voted the motion down.

How about the NDP? My hon. friend from Surrey North who brought forward the motion today turned to the then health minister during debate and said: "I must say that for once I agree with the minister. There is no question that this motion", referring to my motion, "is being put forward facetiously by the Liberals in the hope that the government will vote against it". In truth, I never brought forward a motion of dubious intent. I ask if the member for Surrey North can make the same claim today.

• (1050)

I note that this motion put before us asks:

That this House express its concern at the threat to Canada's health care system expressed by the stated intention of the Liberal premiers of the provinces of Quebec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland to forgo universality and embrace user and deterrent fees.

This is one of the most ill placed, illogical, underhanded attacks on the Liberal Party that I have ever seen, but I will not dwell on that, nor on the ethics of the member from Surrey North who introduced this motion.

I will speak to the real problems of the health care system: the cuts, the limits in transfer payments, particularly cash transfer payments by the federal Conservative government and the need for solutions.

Every province in this country is fighting to provide adequate health care. Last night's national news carried the stories on the efforts of British Columbia, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick to reform their health care systems, but even reforms come at a cost.

New Brunswick will close 300 to 400 hospital beds and turn three hospitals into out patient health centres; 250 health care professionals will lose their jobs. Hospital boards will be dissolved.

These reforms are a bitter pill to swallow for this province which was left a legacy of user fees and health care troubles by the Conservative government before it. During the New Brunswick throne speech last month, New Brunswick committed itself to severe restructuring, but it was not without bitterness toward the federal government. Health Minister Russell King said he told the federal health minister that his province and others are having a hard time keeping up with health costs when Ottawa continues to cut back on transfer payments.

Nonetheless, New Brunswick bit the bullet. Its premier and health minister are trying very hard to manage costs without jeopardizing national standards. Can we not give them credit for this instead of calling the minister a threat to universality? I say what absolute rubbish on the part of the New Democratic Party. What absolute hypocrisy, Madam Speaker.

I have closely watched the movements of the government and health department of British Columbia whose royal commission on health care has suggested innovative ways to cut costs and increase efficiency. Last night I saw examples of community-based health care at its finest in a special project in Victoria that aims to help seniors in their homes instead of bringing them into hospitals. I hope it will prove successful and be adopted in all regions of the country.

May I draw members' attention to the fact that all provinces, even so-called wealthy provinces like British Columbia and Ontario, run by New Democratic governments, have had to cut jobs and close beds because of cuts and limits in federal transfer payments. Regardless of political stripe, I applaud any effort by provinces to make health care reforms by trying not to sacrifice service and care. I think efforts like these deserve the approval and respect of this Parliament.

In Saskatchewan, run by a NDP government, hospitals are preparing for a \$113 million cut in grants from the provincial government. Again, this is a bitter pill to swallow, but Saskatchewan cannot afford other options. Across the country, Ontario, Newfoundland, Nova Sco-