

Oral Questions

The policies we are developing with the provinces at this time are doing exactly what we had hoped, to stop the growth of expenditures. With the growth in the economy of 4.5 per cent last year and about 3 per cent this year, eventually we will reduce it from around 10 per cent to around 9 per cent, where we were before.

That will be very competitive. It is a sign that we can have comprehensive and universal health care, meeting the five conditions of the Canada Health Act in a reasonable fashion. We will achieve our goal. We will keep medicare. We will not scrap medicare like the Reform Party suggests.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, wherever costs are lower it is because the standards are not being met right now. It is a sign of things to come.

Experts tell us health care costs are rising by about 50 per cent and the economy is only growing by 4 per cent. The federal government is planning to reduce funding from 10 per cent of GDP to 8 per cent. That means less federal money for medicare, no matter how you look at it.

I have seen the confusion created at the provincial level in Saskatchewan when governments said one thing and did another.

Is the government planning to offload medicare funding on to the provinces by putting a cap on Canada social transfers?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are planning to make sure that in working with the provinces we will control the cost of medicare so that we can keep universal free medicare for all Canadians.

As indicated, the collaboration between the Government of Canada and the provinces has already seen the result that the public side of health care did not increase last year. It has started to decrease. If we all use the discipline needed we will go back to 9 per cent of GDP and we will still have the best medicare.

We will not be trapped in the private sector nets that exist in the United States, where it spends 15 per cent of its GDP. In Canada it is universal, free, costing around 10 per cent now.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we should ask a taxpayer whether it is free.

The Prime Minister speaks in glowing terms about preserving our national health care standards. I will tell the Prime Minister what is really happening.

In Manitoba there is a waiting period of 61.7 weeks, way over one year, for hip replacement surgery. The national standard is 11.3 weeks. Where is the performance? How are we meeting our current commitments? What good are national standards if the provinces cannot deliver on them?

Is the government prepared to bring the Canada Health Act in line with the 1990s and give the provinces real control over medicine delivery and health care financing?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately there are problems in some provinces. The performance is not the same everywhere. In our system medicare—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): It is administered by the provincial governments. If they had a better government in Manitoba perhaps they could do better on that score.

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[Translation]

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The federal government decided on the sly to dissolve the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, an organization that has always been recognized for its independence of the government and its strong stands in advancing the cause of women.

How can the Prime Minister justify the government's decision to abolish the Advisory Council on the Status of Women by handing over its responsibilities to women's organizations that are already in difficulty?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, women's councils across the country were telling us that they were in a better position to do political analyses than people appointed by order in council.

We hear the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois say that the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which was appointed by the government, is less objective than organizations such as FRAPPE or other organizations not working directly under an order in council. This is why we changed the system.

Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is not the opinion of women's groups in Quebec. At least not what I heard yesterday.

My supplementary question is again for the Prime Minister. How can the government claim that the Advisory Council on the Status of Women was meeting needs that no longer exist, when women continue to be the heads of the poorest families in Canada, when they earn less than a man for equal work, when they are the primary victims of violence and when they are always in the most vulnerable jobs?