

harder to find. From every angle, from without and within, our health care system is being pressured.

• (1130)

I ask the government to turn its attention to hospitals closing beds due to lack of funds and to explain to patients and staff that transfer payment cuts are not a problem and that direct taxation by the provinces will fill the void.

Meanwhile, our nurses and doctors are flocking to practise in the United States. American companies hand out glossy brochures displaying sunshine and smiles. Money is not an object, the way it is in our country. More of the American Gross National Product goes to health care than that of any other country.

As our shortage of nurses becomes critical in Canada, we will see them disappear, beckoned south by higher wages and salaries commensurate with the respect they deserve.

There are other things as well: treatment facilities for new diseases and for the elderly. Care centres for the elderly are desperately needed as their numbers swell with the addition of the baby boom generation. These are problems we Canadians face today: beds closing, inadequate care, stressed health care professionals.

I challenge you, Mr. Speaker, to ask any American which country, our or theirs, has a better health care system. American will say Canada, because in Canada we are guided by five basic principles of the Canada Health Act: accessibility, portability, comprehensiveness, universality, and non-profit public administration. These principles ensure that every Canadian, rich or poor, has the right to proper treatment.

The United States has many beautiful facilities with technology that is the envy of the world, but those centres are for the people who can pay to be well. It is a two-tiered system of health care, where what one earns and where one resides determines the treatment one receives. Without proper health insurance, one accident, one disease, can destroy the life savings of a family, ruining their lives.

There are many issues in our health care system that need to be addressed. There are issues that have been left to fester and problems that are new today, but there

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is no question in my mind these problems must be tackled. But are transfer payment cuts the way to do it, or will that make the suffering worse? I submit that the suffering will be worse.

Some people believe the government will introduce new legislation to protect medicare, as was said in the budget, that the government will give away tax points to the provinces in exchange for the reduction in transfer payments. But I ask: What is the policy basis? Have we told Canadians?

The problem remains: What will happen to the have-not provinces? They do not have a tax base that can deliver more tax to them for medicare funding. Those provinces will have no choice, as was recently seen in Newfoundland, but to cut services.

There are two points which must be considered. First, medicare is slipping away right now. Beds are being closed. Without proper funding a breakdown is occurring. Only a renewed financial commitment to medicare will halt this collapse. Second, with the change in funding policy the government will lose the penalty measures for provinces not abiding by the Canada Health Act. It is imperative the government move to find another penalizing system.

Medicare is a Canadian institution that must be protected. It was promised to Canadians in 1919 by the Liberal Party. It was given birth by the Liberal Party and we would like to continue to nurture this great social program.

As I conclude, may I say I hope we can again find the support for medicare we had in 1984, only six short years ago. I would like to hold the minister of health to a statement made in the House on December 17, and I quote:

One thing the (government) does is respect the Constitution of Canada. We respect the fact the delivery of health care services is given to the provinces within the confines of the Canada Health Act.

I pray this respect for the Canada Health Act is still part of the Conservatives' tenets. I hope the Conservatives and every member of the House will join me and my party in support of medicare.

I ask this House to reaffirm our commitment to this basic right of citizenship and move to address the problems confronting our health care system.