

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, I do not have a clue as to why Mr. John Arthur supposedly said that to my colleague. I met him yesterday in the elevator. He did not say anything to me. He had a big smile.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Epp: Met him in the elevator!

Miss MacDonald: That is the only place he will meet her!

Miss Bégin: The hon. member should ask him. What I know for a fact is that all senior citizens in Canada who need help are total or partial beneficiaries of the GI supplement. The supplement costs the country a fortune. We consider it to be a right for all those over the age of 65 who are in need. Our objective as a government is to bring all of them above the poverty line. This is their right, and the supplement should not go to those who do not need it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1420)

INVESTMENTS IN REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PLANS

Miss Pat Carney (Vancouver Centre): Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. It is too bad she can only meet Mr. Arthur in the elevator. He appeared before our Conservative task force on the budget, here on Parliament Hill, to give us that information.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss Carney: The minister has continually criticized the private sector for not contributing enough toward pension incomes. Since pension funds are designed to pay only part of a pensioner's income, many Canadians borrow money each year to invest in an RRSP, as the minister knows. The average amount of money borrowed by Canadians to invest in an RRSP is about \$2,215. Does the Minister of National Health and Welfare support the plan to tax the interest paid on funds borrowed to purchase an RRSP, thus reducing the opportunity for Canadians to provide for their own future, because that is the inevitable result? Does she support that plan?

[Translation]

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, if I told the hon. member that I am taking a stand on the point she just raised, she would accuse me of failing to respect the opinion of the House. The hon. member knows perfectly well that this general budget proposal was referred by the Minister of Finance on December 18, I believe, to a parliamentary committee for consideration. Where pension reform is concerned, the hon. member does not seem to realize that RRSPs are an instrument used by taxpayers to accumulate pensions if they happen to be among those

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who can afford to invest \$3,500 or \$5,000 every year. Most Canadians cannot, and therefore cannot take advantage of RRSPs. The budget is taking the aggregate of tax privileges and trying to introduce an element of fairness, and I shall always support this principle.

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[English]

EDUCATION

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Secretary of State. The minister will know that he is paying \$1.8 billion to the provincial governments this year for post-secondary education. In answer to a question on February 3 from the hon. member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill, the Minister of National Health and Welfare said that her cash payments to the provinces for the three health programs for which she is responsible will be increased next year by 13.4 per cent. Will the minister's cash payments to the provinces, now at \$1.8 billion, be increased by 13.4 per cent?

Hon. Gerald Regan (Secretary of State): Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to the hon. member for bringing a very important subject to the floor of the House. It provides me with an opportunity to remind hon. members that, at the recent first ministers' conference, the Prime Minister made an offer to the provinces that we would extend for the next two years the provisions under which funds are transferred in the block form to the provinces, for post-secondary education purposes, increasing in the vicinity of just over 12 per cent in each of those years, provided that the provinces undertake that they do not during that time diminish the percentage of the cost of post-secondary education which they are paying out of their own funds.

Unfortunately, we have a very sad situation in this country. We have a serious problem in relation to post-secondary education because most of the provinces, year after year, have been decreasing the percentage of the cost of post-secondary education that they pay, while the federal government has year by year been increasing its percentage. For instance, in the hon. member's province of Ontario, the portion that the provincial government of Ontario pays—

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are in favour of short questions and short answers.

LEVEL OF FUNDING

Mr. Don Blenkarn (Mississauga South): Madam Speaker, the minister then is confirming that he paid the provinces this year \$1.825 billion and he will be increasing that by a percentage which is the same percentage as required under the Established Programs Financing Act for 1982-83. Will he confirm that, and will he confirm that there will be no diminution during the next fiscal year, in his estimates, of the