

Oral Questions

would move down to the United States. It is the same in any part of the country.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): My hon. friend is talking about a previous question. If he wants to ask a question on that, I would be happy to respond to that as well.

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HEALTH CARE

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

In his budget the Minister of Finance cut \$2.3 billion in cash transfers to provinces, much of which was for health care. This morning the minister said that he would compensate provinces with tax points.

Can the minister be frank with Canadians and tell this House today that tax points, particularly with the have not provinces, will not fully compensate for loss in cash?

• (1430)

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly very much in your hands. As the hon. member prefaced his questions saying that he was referring to a matter that was before the House in debate today, I am in your hands as to whether or not I should be responding to that question. I would be pleased to do so, although the convention in this House has been that matters addressed in debate are not dealt with during Question Period.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I think the subject has been discussed for many weeks. I would like to ask the minister the second question, if he does not wish to answer the first one.

Provincial ministers are not impressed with this minister's unilateral plans. Can the minister commit to this House that he will immediately consult with a view to reaching a consensus with his provincial counterparts, before going any further and thereby save medicare?

That was not asked in the question before us today.

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, the same concern applies here. Notwithstanding the parliamentary conventions, let me attempt to respond to my hon. friend.

Mr. Speaker: If the minister does not wish to answer, of course that is the minister's right. The hon. minister has the floor.

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to take advantage of the opportunity to try to put one of these shibboleths to rest.

The net cost to the federal government, the net benefit to provincial treasuries as a result of a shift from cash transfers to tax point transfers, is identical.

The hon. member asked whether or not I am prepared to consult with colleagues at the provincial level as well as to consult with people outside government. Of course I do that regularly, but the plans that were announced in the budget by the Minister of Finance is the announcement of the policy of the Government of Canada. It is important that we all work together to ensure the fiscal soundness of this country.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Patients throughout Canada who need medical attention, such as victims of heart attacks, are already queuing up and waiting for costly operations. Some of them may have to wait for up to a week on a temporary bed. With a medicare system already on the decline, how can Canadians ever hope to have an effective system or even hope the existing system to survive, threatened as it is while the decisions of his government continue to undermine the institutions which Canadians hold dearest? How?

[*English*]

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, this year alone the federal government will transfer some \$14 billion to the provinces for the administration of health care in Canada.

When she criticizes the delivery systems, for example in our home province, she is really criticizing the provin-