

*Government Orders*

simple: While things are so equal, with this being the truth, how can she say that this government, which is more committed to preserving the health care system than any other preceding it, is destroying the system; how can she fail to tell the true story, fail to recognize the impact of drug patents, especially in the Province of Quebec, where people can no longer afford to buy drugs like they used to in previous years?

**Mrs. Picard:** Mr. Speaker, the role of the federal Department of Health at the outset was to transfer sums of money for certain programs being established at the time, like the EPF which was calculated per capita. But, the government, because it holds the power to spend, decided to reduce its deficit by cutting and freezing transfer payments.

The demand for health care in the provinces has increased and freezing transfer payments has reduced the provinces' ability to manage their health care system. Last year, the decision to extend the freeze meant that billions of dollars were not transferred to Quebec, and these billions of dollars which the Province of Quebec did not receive obliged it to reduce the services offered in hospitals. This year, transfer payments will be cut even more.

That is not the role of the Department of Health. The department is supposed to transfer moneys owed to the provinces. Regardless of how it will come about, the result will be that funding for health care will be reduced and it is the provincial governments who will get the squeeze when the population or the costs of new technology and pharmaceutical products rise. And now, the provinces have to do the dirty work associated with the cuts in transfer payments for health care services. The government should limit itself to transferring the moneys it promised at the very beginning, in 1967, when it imposed standards, when it imposed the principles of the Canada Health Act.

**Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, since we did not have time to discuss it, and my colleague for Drummond is the health critic, I would like to ask her what she thinks of the absence of the provincial governments from the national forum on health.

**Mrs. Picard:** Mr. Speaker, I find it completely absurd, because the Liberals had promised a national forum on health during the election campaign with all the provinces being invited to review the system as a whole, since they are on the front line and are primarily concerned, as it is they that manage the health care system. And then the government ignored the provinces.

• (1555)

It probably invited people who are doubtless competent. But this is not their role. It is the role of the provinces. The ministers

of health of each province have something to say. They know what they need.

The situation is absurd. Millions more are being spent for what? We will end up with one more report on the shelf, and that will be the end of that. We will move on to another electoral program in which we will be promised a new national forum on health.

[*English*]

**Mr. McTeague:** Mr. Speaker, I want to be perfectly clear about the comments made by the member for Drummond. Once again the Bloc Québécois demonstrates that it is not prepared to live up to the reality of why the health care system is in such bad shape and has badly deteriorated.

The reality is that when drug prices increase by 12 per cent a year it affects the province of Quebec and every other province. They are undermining health care costs.

The Bloc Québécois demonstrates once again that it is prepared to play all sorts of sleight of hand and to use a good budget like the one presented by the Minister of Finance for another agenda. If the member is concerned about the health care system, will you and your party not agree that—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Order. I remind members to direct their interventions through the Speaker.

**Mr. McTeague:** I wish the member would respond adequately to the following question. How is it possible that the Bloc Québécois and the member are interested in attacking the budget without dealing with the reality that drug prices are undermining the health care system and not the budget of the finance minister?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Picard:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to my hon. colleague. I would like to know how his constituents react to being told that the Minister of Finance is cutting transfer payments to the provinces for health care. In Quebec, if there is a shortfall of \$1.2 billion, who is going to suffer? Your taxpayers, sir.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger):** Order. I encourage members equally, and perhaps I should do it more forcefully, to direct their interventions through the Chair.

**Mrs. Picard:** I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. I apologize.

Taxpayers will be the ones to suffer. However, these are the very taxpayers who, along with Quebecers, provide \$30 billion in taxes. Quebecers were promised that funds for health care would be returned to Quebec to cover the cost of administering their health care system, since its administration is a provincial and not a federal matter.