

*Private Members' Business*

lions of dollars in order to be able to keep providing health care services. Eight billion dollars, Mr. Speaker, can you imagine? What can the provinces do in the face of this kind of offloading?

It should come as no surprise that a motion is before this House, asking the federal government to give the provinces more flexibility so they can decide how to meet the challenge of providing adequate care services to their people.

Members of the Bloc Québécois cannot support this motion because we feel this would let the government off the hook for the harm it is doing to the entire system. It would be too easy.

It has been some time since the federal government met the commitments it made to its provincial partners in 1977. Today, however, we are being asked only to seek more flexibility which, at best, would mean privatizing certain services or approving the use of private clinics and double billing.

For us there is only one solution: the federal government must withdraw altogether from this provincial jurisdiction and give the provinces fair compensation in the form of tax points.

It is clear that the federal government has reneged on its initial commitments to the provinces. It is also clear that by continuing to apply its standards to an area that falls under provincial jurisdiction, while refusing to pay the real cost, the federal government is like someone who asks you out to dinner and leaves you with the bill.

Although at the time it was very critical of the policy initiated by the previous Conservative government, the present government is accelerating the advent across Canada of a two-tier health care system, with on one side, basic services covered by medicare and on the other, specialized care and advanced technology available to those who can afford it. This means waiting lists for some, but no waiting if you can afford to pay.

Without comprehensive reform and the vision that is necessary for a balanced health care system, excessive funding cuts will set the new standard for the health care system.

• (1145)

They can promise deep reforms all they want, and a national forum presided over by none other than the Prime Minister, it will mean nothing until they go beyond those empty promises.

The problem is that the Minister of Finance could not wait to impose his reforms. In addition, just like his predecessors, he coupled his unilateral, insidious and heavy cuts with mandatory health care system reforms.

You would have to be naïve not to realize that the Canada social transfer is just a veiled attempt to slash funding for education, social assistance and health. You would also have to be naïve to believe the Minister of Health when she says that the Canada social transfer will actually ensure that the health care

system stays the way it is, yet give Quebec and the provinces more room to manoeuvre. How can the minister actually say such things, and believe them?

Let us be serious now; there is a paradox in the federal government talking about giving Quebec and the provinces more room to manoeuvre so that they can dispense quality health care services yet all the while continuing to increase the burden placed on the public finances of the provinces.

In 1977, when the federal government created the Canada Health Act, it agreed to assume 50 per cent of the cost of maintaining the health insurance system. Over the years, we have seen that contribution shrink to 38 per cent. Betraying the campaign promises made in the red book, the current government would reduce its share to 28.5 per cent.

The federal government still does not understand that all of these years of offloading to the provinces has aggravated their financial situations as much as it has jeopardized the survival of social programs. What is more is that by imposing overlaps in areas that its own constitution does not give it powers, and by continuing to cut funding, the federal government is preventing Quebec and the provinces from finding real solutions to the financial crisis they are fighting.

As many studies have shown, the federal government's financial intransigence is propelling our health care system towards radical changes. Nevertheless, Quebec and the provinces are all trying to come up with solutions to forestall the disappearance of the current quality standards.

The very essence of the motion before us today bears witness to the will of Quebecers and Canadians to pull out all stops to find a solution. Everybody is working towards this goal, except the centralist government which refuses to live by its own constitution and to respect the provinces' exclusive power over health care.

What is sad, and history proves it, is that the federal government has always had the same ambition: being the only government in Canada.

In conclusion, the Bloc Québécois cannot support the Reform Party's motion. Although this motion supports certain principles that we defend and denounces to a certain point the federal government's unilateral pull-out from the Canada Health Act, the contract it signed with the provinces in 1977, it does not get to the crux of the matter.

In our opinion, the provinces should be the only operators in the area of health care. From parliamentary commissions to consultations of all kinds, Quebec and the provinces have demonstrated that they are capable of rising to the health care challenge. If only the government would stop penalizing them with cut after cut without any financial compensation, they