

Supply

NDP premiers have already broken the universality. Why was that not included in the NDP motion?

Mr. Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Madam Speaker, the member raises an important issue. He asks us why we would want to make this a partisan issue.

It is quite clear that there is one party only which speaks for health care in this country, one party that speaks for the interests of Canadians in health care. In my province of Saskatchewan, for example, it is the case that some hospitals are going to be closed. The population is changing and it is necessary to reassess how we deliver those services. But it is not necessary to reassess whether or not we are opposed to user fees, whether or not we are opposed to deterrent fees. Canadians are opposed to them. Liberal premiers should be opposed to them. The Liberal Party should be opposed to them. Members on the government side should be opposed to them but they are not; they are arguing for user fees.

The member may be upset that this becomes somewhat a partisan issue, but it is clear the New Democratic premiers and the New Democratic Party federally are supportive of a universal, accessible health care system. We will never accept user fees and deterrent fees, unlike the premiers of Quebec, Newfoundland and New Brunswick.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, I am used to being surprised by the NDP, but my surprise today is something different. I understand that it is always defending what is best for everybody.

However, if the NDP wants a political debate, that is fine. Canadians have a lot of questions about their health care system. Many times I said with regard to user fees and the great principles of the system that we stand on those principles. I said that last week and again yesterday. I stated publicly in terms of user fees that I was opposed and that so far I believe there is no contradiction.

What surprises me is today they are coming with something where they are concerned about the provinces. I am wondering why they do not go to Quebec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and ask the legislatures to pass something they want. Instead, they raise the question in the House.

My own perception is there is a vast and strong majority of members of Parliament who agree with that. If they want a political debate, that is fine. I believe that it is typical of the NDP, create a problem when we know that the problem is not there. They want to be the defenders of the system. We already are. They created it and we continue it.

I do not understand. I would like to emphasize again that if they want to make a political debate, that is fine, but this is not the place when it concerns the provinces. I stand on what I said, but they will not prevent Canadians asking questions about their system. They are worried.

We saw the premiers yesterday. Even NDP premiers, I can say, maybe not officially, are worried about that. When we have a \$13 billion deficit, we worry about a lot of things in the system.

I say that if Canadians ask questions about the system, that is fine, but why do my friends raise that question here today when the question is not relevant to the kind of statement I made? I believe this has been the government stand since the beginning.

Mr. Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Madam Speaker, first of all perhaps I could thank the minister for his statements opposed to user fees, consistently arguing against user fees under some pressure, I am sure, from his own colleagues and from his own province. I think it is important that the health minister for Canada argues strongly for the Canada Health Act and the provisions of that health act. This motion, as the minister will know, is not criticizing the minister's position on this question.

I think it is important for Canadians to know where the political parties in this country stand on health care. It is one of the issues that they will be addressing when they go to the polls at the next election. It is important that they know that Liberal premiers across this country are saying we should have user fees when Canadians do not want them, that there are significant segments within the Conservative Party arguing for user fees when Canadians do not want them and that the Reform Party is arguing for user fees too.

Each of those parties is undermining the universality and the accessibility of our health care system. It is important that Canadians understand that. It is important that Canadians know that the New Democratic Party stands for a universally accessible program and will not ever give into user fees or deterrent fees.