

Supply

Referring to the editorial in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which says "Medicare still lives and death is not imminent", I would say that in fact even the editorial, if you read between the lines, is truly concerned about the health of medicare.

In terms of creative proposals, I would challenge the minister today to undertake a commitment to this House, if he has not already done so, to look at the report by the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, *Is There a Crisis?*, released in June of last year, which examined the accessibility to hospital services. Has he had the time to study this document, and what is he prepared to tell the House today in response to the many recommendations incorporated in this document, including the creation of a national health care resource plan?

Those are my comments and specific questions and I would like the hon. minister to kindly provide this House with the appropriate answers.

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to what he called a secret report within Statistics Canada concerning the national debt. If such a secret report exists, it is a secret to me as well.

I very much appreciate my hon. friend raising the question because it gives me the opportunity to challenge him. He mentioned that a certain percentage of the national debt burden we have each year is coming from compounding interest on the national debt.

The obvious question this begs is: Who was in office as the national debt was driven up and as we found that year after year the national debt was being added to?

If you take a look at the period from 1984 to 1991, you will find that the government during that period generated sufficient funds to pay for all of its ongoing expenses. Increases in the national debt since that time have come as a result of compounding interest payments on the national debt.

The hon. member attempts to dismiss this as being unimportant or somehow irrelevant. The point is that today the first 35 cents out of every dollar that comes from Canadians' tax funds goes just to pay the interest on the national debt. That is before we have a penny for pensions, before we have a penny for medicare, and before we have a penny for assistance to the poor.

We see that figure continuing to grow. The real challenge we all face in this debate today is to be honest with Canadians and say whether or not we are prepared today to make the commitment to turn that around.

We will be spending over \$40 billion this year on interest payments on the national debt. That is more than we have in the whole budget of National Health and Welfare. Imagine what we could do for health care in Canada if that money were available instead of going for interest payments on the national debt. Imagine what we could do for the poor, for illiteracy, for aid to refugees, for the defence of Canada, or for a whole range of other programs that we in this House believe in.

We cannot because that money is going to pay interest payments on the national debt.

The government has made its position clear; that figure must be brought down. We cannot allow Canada's social programs to continue to be threatened by an increasing debt load which each year reduces the amount of money available to the federal government to pay for these important services.

• (1210)

My hon. friend says that the *Winnipeg Free Press* believes there are challenges facing medicare. Indeed, so do I. Should all Canadians be concerned? Yes, all Canadians should take an interest in their national system. What we see are pressures on the system which challenge it around the world. If we are to preserve our system of medicare, it is important that we adapt to change and not simply live in the past.

The hon. member cites a Senate subcommittee report; yes I have had a chance to take a look at that. He asked me how I respond to it. I respond to that and to the issues he raises today in this way: It is important for all Canadians to set aside partisanship and to come together for a fundamental discussion on the role of health care and the promotion of health in our society.

We must ask ourselves questions concerning the percentage of our Gross National Product we are prepared to consecrate simply for the delivery of health care services, and how we want to use our moneys in the future most effectively. We must take tough decisions in some cases, tough decisions which were not recommended by the hon. member opposite. We must sit down and work together with all the stakeholders: the hospitals, the professionals, the scientists, governments and