

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister not agree that what the C.D. Howe Institute is advocating today the federal government has been doing since it took office?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, as my hon. friend knows, transfers to provinces have over the last nine years been increased on an average of about 5.2 per cent a year.

An hon. member: Not for medicare.

Mr. Mulroney: Transfers to provinces have been increased on an average of 5.2 per cent which now greatly exceeds the rate of inflation. Transfers to provinces exceed in large measure the amounts of rates of increase in program expenditures and management exercises in Ottawa.

An hon. member: By a long shot.

Mr. Mulroney: By a very considerable long shot. That indicates not only our philosophy but our willingness to actively support vital programs such as medicare.

I suppose I have a small question for my hon. friend. When he began by saying in his prefatory remark that he spoke on behalf of his colleagues, is that a statement that binds all his caucus?

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that in a press release the other day Ernst and Young, looking at the financial situation of the province of British Columbia, said: "Because of the federal cutbacks to the cost shared programs it will cost \$1,200 for every household in the province this year alone".

• (1430)

The Prime Minister is aware that by 1996-97 for the province of Quebec, cash transfers will have all gone. By the year 2009, cash transfers to the provinces for health care will be zero.

Will the Prime Minister not admit that when cash transfers are zero it will be impossible for the government to ensure that the National Health Act can be enforced?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend forgets a very small matter. Tax points are cash. Transfers take place in cash and tax points. He has just neglected a very significant part of the equation.

No wonder NDP members are having trouble with their economic policy. No wonder the economic spokesman has resigned or been fired. In point of fact, since 1984-85 total transfers to provinces, EPF, equalization and CAP have gone from \$25.6 billion to \$40.4 billion. That is a very significant increase which reflects almost a 5.5 per cent increase every year.

How the money is used when it is received by some provinces is a different kettle of fish. If they insist on giving employees, for example, in the past, wages of 12 per cent and 15 per cent, as has been done in some jurisdictions, then they do not have enough money left over to fund medicare the way it should have been.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops): Mr. Speaker, if the government continues along these lines in reducing cash transfers to the provinces, the government's ability to control and ensure that medicare is available in every province in Canada will be eliminated. That is the reality.

My question is very specific. The Minister of National Defence has suggested that we ought to test user fees now with the provinces. Unfortunately even the Leader of the Official Opposition on Sunday did not come out clearly against user fees.

Will the Prime Minister now stand in his place and make clear for the Canadian public that his government will never impose user fees on the health care system in this country?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. friend about the Leader of the Opposition. I have been reading his interview with Mike Duffy and I never thought that I would live long enough to say this, but Duffy was a model of clarity compared to the answers.

I agree with my hon. friend there is a very worrisome policy shift developing in the Liberals because the Leader of the Opposition appears to be saying now, and he can well check the transcripts again, he is not necessarily against user fees. This raises a very serious question because it represents a policy shift for the Liberals.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Table it. Don't play these dirty games.

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg South Centre asked me to table it. Please may I read it before I table it? I can assure you it does not get any clearer, Lloyd. I will be delighted to table it. I can assure