

shared by all, and particularly the Minister of Finance, who is showing just the opposite with Bill C-76.

• (1545)

I realize that the Minister of Health cherishes the principles which, at the time, were instrumental in establishing what she invariably refers to as the best health care system in the world. However, I do not think that, cherished though they may be, these principles had any impact on the government's budgetary decisions. It is clear that the minister failed miserably in her attempt to obtain the appropriate financing for our health care system.

Perhaps I may recall for the benefit of hon. members what the Minister of Health had to say about the impact of the cuts and freezes imposed at the time by the Conservative government on transfers to the provinces for health care programs.

The minister said in 1992, and I quote: "Cutting back on the transfers in these areas has not contributed to better management of our health care system". She went on to say: "We have literally forced our deficit on to the provinces and said to the provinces they have a choice: they can either increase their taxes or cut back on their services. What we have seen in many instances is a mix of the two".

Then, still in the same speech, the minister indicated the following: "Cutting back on the transfers in these areas has not contributed to better management of our health care system. They have only contributed to the cutbacks and to the fear that we feel now across the nation as the middle income group, which is the largest group of Canadians, are frightened and afraid of what is going to happen to them in the future. Will there be a health care system for them, will they be able to get the drugs that they need at the prices they can afford to pay when they need them, when they get to be a certain age? There is this feeling that perhaps the federal government is letting go of its responsibilities in this matter".

So what does the Minister of Health have to say now about her government's responsibility for health care, when the bill before the House today offloads \$7 billion of the deficit to the provinces by cutting transfer payments? Since she probably knows better than anyone else the serious consequences of these cutbacks, what did she do and what is she doing now to defend her position before the Minister of Finance?

In fact, the Minister of Health has abdicated her responsibilities. When the last budget was brought down, she formally announced there would be a national forum on health, as promised in the red book, to be chaired by none other than the Prime Minister. We were told the health care system would be

spared until the conclusions of the vast public forum were known.

While the Minister of Health was unable to hold her forum, which was going to provide all the answers, her colleague, the Minister of Finance, wasted no time and spared no expense on a course of action. The national forum, the discussions and the reforms were all to be scuttled; blind, uniform and unilateral cuts were the answer.

The Minister of Health who must see the same two-tiered two-speed system we see everywhere in Canada, should have the courage to rise in this House and denounce the unilateral decisions of her colleague, the Minister of Finance.

Bill C-76 proves to us that the Minister of Finance is not getting caught up in his colleagues' proposed reforms. In the case of the Axworthy reforms, he did not wait for either the report or the recommendations. The agenda for reform was so vague, there was no time to wait. This was the case also for the national forum on health. At the rate things are going, with the health department dragging its feet and finance charging away at a gallop, there will probably be no more money for transfers by the time the Minister of Finance gets a whiff of a recommendation from the national forum on health.

In the final analysis, this bill is the antithesis of flexible federalism. Nothing in it, in the facts or in the measures announced alters the status quo in the slightest. On the contrary, it confirms the governments imperialist propensity to conduct its business with the provinces by presenting them with a fait accompli. It is true to its vision of ever more centralized federalism.

Mr. Speaker, I conclude on this point. The bill conceals serious consequences for the future. It continues to widen the gap between the rich and the poor in our society and condemns many aspects of our social programs to certain death. The people of Canada have to know these things. More specifically, the people of Quebec have to know them before they make a final decision on the federal system, which is clearly not managing to solve its problems and is even less successful at changing to meet the expectations of Quebecers.

• (1550)

Mr. Dan McTeague (Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the speech by the hon. member for Drummond.

Earlier on, she talked about our health care system and the negative effect that this budget would have on drug costs and on Canada's health care system. Yet, I did not hear the hon. member say a word about what really has an impact on the system, drug patents, which, interestingly enough, the Bloc Quebecois supports.

My question is based on reality. The reality is that the health care system is falling into ruins because of an annual increase of 12 per cent caused by the system that the previous government left behind. My question for the hon. member opposite will be