

Oral Questions

bia. National health care reform requires more co-operation, not less, between federal and provincial governments.

Will the Prime Minister instruct his Minister of Health to stop antagonizing and start listening to the provinces on health care reform?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, we have a very clear law of Parliament that medicare in Canada is free for everybody.

• (1425)

We have a law in Canada that says there will not be a two tier system of medicare, one for the rich and one for the poor. We also have a law in Canada which says that if one province is engaged in that direction we shall cut off funds to it.

The minister is doing what is right. She is making sure that the laws of Parliament are respected.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, the root of the financial difficulties of health care lies in the fact that federal transfers to the provinces in support of health care have consistently declined over the last 15 years. Just last week the finance minister promised further cuts to federal transfers.

If the Prime Minister is really committed to health care, will he commit today to maintaining federal transfers to health care at present levels and to making deeper spending cuts elsewhere required to support that commitment?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, this is another good day. Now the leader of the Reform Party is pleading with us not to cut. I hope the Minister of Finance will note that.

In our platform we said that we were to maintain the level of transfers to the provinces, that they were not to be reduced, and they were not reduced in the last budget.

We say to the provinces that we want to sit down with them. The Minister of Health is organizing the conference that I will be presiding over in June wherein we will make sure that free medicare is portable for all our citizens whatever their financial means, respected and operated efficiently. We will have that meeting to do that and I hope the Reform Party will support this process. In fact, yesterday when I said that we should keep that system in Canada I saw many of his members applauding.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is avoiding the issue. When national medicare was introduced the federal government made a solemn commitment to carry 50 per cent of the cost to the provinces.

Today federal transfers in support of health care in provinces like British Columbia cover only 36 per cent of the cost. Yet the federal government continues to use the Canada Health Act to tell the province how to finance and operate the system. In other

words, health care is being choked between reduced federal transfers and an outdated national health care act.

My question to the Prime Minister is very simple. Will he stop the choking? Will he promise that federal transfers in support of health care will be maintained and instruct the health minister to give the provinces more latitude, not less, in developing solutions to their health care needs?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, of course there are some problems in the administration of medicare. We have said that and we have said that is why we need a conference.

It has been a good system. It is a system the Canadian people want to maintain. We have to sit down with the provinces to make sure that it is revisited at this time and that it is operating properly. It has been a great service to Canada since it was established. I think all Canadians want to keep it.

We want to work to maintain it. I am happy to see the Reform Party supporting the notion that we should have free medicare and not two types of medicare for people in Canada.

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[Translation]

Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. After 22 months of waiting, BioVac has still not received approval for its BCG cancer vaccine, while Connaught of Toronto obtained such approval after only a 14-month wait. I reminded the minister yesterday that her department was applying a double standard.

My question is this: Now that she has had the time to do the necessary checks, can the minister tell us when BioVac will receive its authorization?

• (1430)

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, an application for the BCG therapeutic product used in treating cancer of the bladder was filed by Connaught Laboratories on March 2, 1989. The notice of compliance was issued on April 25, 1990. The approval process thus took 13 1/2 months.

The Biochem file on BCG cancer, a product intended to treat bladder cancer, was received on June 10, 1992. The hon. member must realize that we receive a growing number of submissions of new research drugs and new drugs that qualify for priority evaluation; this increase is mainly due to progress in the biotechnology industry.

These priority applications take precedence over regular ones that are already being processed in order of receipt. Many physicians wishing to obtain the product from Biochem in order