

Oral Questions

Seventy per cent of B.C. residents are already enrolled in private insurance plans to pay for certain services, including long term and extended care. The desire of B.C. residents is choice in medicare.

Why will the minister not acknowledge the desire of B.C. residents and other Canadians in allowing for genuine medicare innovations and reforms through choice?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have the best choice of all. Without having to worry whether or not they can afford it, they can choose which doctor and which hospital. They can choose without undue pressures and financial hardships.

• (1450)

The hon. member speaks of British Columbia. That province agreed with the federal government and was the province that moved most quickly and banned all extra billing, user charges, and facility fees by October 1 of this year.

Mrs. Sharon Hayes (Port Moody—Coquitlam, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the same minister.

The minister is selective in what she will tolerate. Private insurance plans are tolerated, yet the minister intends to stomp out private clinics. In B.C., private cataract eye clinics have been shut down, forcing seniors to be added to unacceptably long public waiting lists.

Why is the minister discriminating against seniors while permitting other private options to continue? Why the inconsistency?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Health Act says that the provincial plans must cover medically necessary services for the residents in their provinces. That is what is happening. That is what we will ensure continues to happen.

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[Translation]

QUEBEC AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Agriculture.

Information provided by the federal Department of Agriculture confirms that this department has been particularly remiss in its treatment of Quebec. In 1994-95, the agri-food industry in Quebec received only 10 per cent of Agriculture Canada's budget, although Quebec has more than 21 per cent of Canada's agri-food industry.

Does the minister agree, as confirmed by information provided by the federal department of agriculture, that the way his

department's expenditures are budgeted is unfair to Quebec's agri-food industry?

[English]

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker, I would not make that admission. One has to take into account the entire range of federal policies that apply to agriculture. In some cases those policies provide for grants and contributions, either to producers directly or to producer organizations, marketing systems, institutions and so forth.

Another very valuable form of contribution by the Government of Canada comes in the form of our regulatory system that creates Canadian supply management, and 45 per cent of Quebec agriculture falls within the jurisdiction of the Canadian supply management system, which results in billions of dollars worth of benefits to Quebec and Canadian consumers and producers.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean H. Leroux (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about sectors. My point is that the federal government gives us 10 per cent, although the agri-food industry in Quebec represents 21 per cent of the entire sector.

Since the Liberals came to power, the minister has done nothing about this unfair treatment of the agri-food industry in Quebec.

Would the minister agree that closing the federal agricultural research centre in La Pocatière will merely exacerbate the current situation?

[English]

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. gentleman makes reference to agricultural research. If we were to apply the hard and fast formulae he just suggested to the field of agricultural research, it would result in a cutback with respect to the province of Quebec.

In fact we have 18 national centres of excellence in agricultural research and development in the country. Four of them are located in the province of Quebec, at Ste-Foy, at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, at Lennoxville and at St-Hyacinthe, which is the highest number in the country.

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HEALTH CARE

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, as the discussion goes back and forth with the Minister of Health, I hear her saying that Canadians get the very best choice.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.