

Health Care

longer accepted wisdom that medicine and government should never mix. The federal government's primary objective in the health field has been to promote and assist the development of essential services on a nationwide basis, the development of comparable standards of service across Canada, and to help make available the human, physical and financial resources required to provide these services. Much has been accomplished, and we do not need to review it all now.

This is not the time, however, to weaken the federal presence in the responsibility for health care; this is a time to strengthen it. To withdraw the federal presence and replace it only with tax points and other financial resources would be wrong. It would be much better, it seems to me, to remain an active participant and see that our 50 per cent share, or whatever it is, is being spent for the maximum benefit of Canadians and is fairly distributed.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare has clearly stated that the basic standards of comprehensiveness, accessibility, universality and portability would be maintained under any new scheme of health financing. I only wish I could share his faith that in giving the provinces more freedom and flexibility the result will be better health services at less cost. Maybe that will be so for British Columbia or Manitoba—I do not know—but as one who comes from northern Ontario I can tell the House that we have absolutely no faith or confidence in the government which presently occupies the seat of power at Queen's Park. Our medical care premiums are among the highest in Canada, yet in vast stretches of the province of Ontario there is little or nothing in the way of health care services.

Whatever the financial arrangements may be that the minister will work out with the provinces, I urge this government to have a strong voice in seeing that the funds allocated are appropriately and equitably used by the provincial authorities.

Hon. Robert Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to enter into a debate with the hon. member who has just resumed his seat, except to say that it seems to me a good deal of his speech would have been more appropriately made to the legislature at Queen's Park rather than here.

I should like to address myself to some of the things the minister said. I am sorry he is not here. I am sure he has a valid reason for being out of the House. The minister took a pot-shot at me for being out of the House in the middle of the week. I am sure a pressing engagement has taken him from the House, but I am sorry he is not here. I would feel a little easier saying some of the things I intend to say if he was here to hear them.

An hon. Member: It couldn't be that important.

Mr. Stanfield: We will see how important it is. First let me say that the minister took exception to a comment I made on Wednesday in respect of his proposal, and made the charge that I had made comments without knowing what he had said. The minister has a tendency toward this kind of offhand, snide comment. Apparently he had forgotten that his office, which is much more courteous than

[Mr. Penner.]

he is, had sent me full documentation of the proposals. I had that documentation before me and was able to read and study it.

I may tell the minister through you, Sir, that I have had quite long experience in analysing proposals put forward by the Department of National Health, both here and in connection with my former responsibilities. Although the proposal here is complex, as has usually been the case, it does not take anybody with ten years' experience or more in analysing such proposals to see through them rather quickly. I am sure the distinguished member of the NDP who sponsored this motion was able to analyse the proposals in the same way. I do not take offence easily, but I resent the kind of stupid remark the minister made, when he does not even know what his own officials are doing as far as dispensing information is concerned.

It is very clear that the main purpose of the minister is to restrict federal financial responsibility in this area. That is the main purpose of this whole exercise, although it has been dressed up with a lot of talk about flexibility, and so on. I do not question the earnestness or the desire of the minister or his department to exercise the machinery which exists for controlling the growth of and the expenditure for these programs. I do not question their sincerity, but the whole purpose of this exercise is to limit the increase in the financial responsibility of this government. That is the main thing I want to say this afternoon, and that is why I suggest that any provincial government which accepts this proposal is out of its mind. I put it as simply and as bluntly as that.

The schemes which are in effect today were put forward by the federal government in the areas of hospitalization and medical care. There was no negotiation or discussion about essential matters. The hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas) will recall very well, I am sure, that there was no give and take on any matter of these programs. The principles and the main features of these programs were laid down by the federal government, and that was that—the provinces either took them or left them.

Now the federal government has apparently made up its mind that it is not getting full value for the programs it laid out, and wants to restrict its financial liability. It talks about injecting flexibility into the programs but gives no indication at all as to how a province such as Nova Scotia, for example, can finance these measures and achieve flexibility. It is all very well to talk about building nursing homes and a whole scheme of institutions to take care of people, but you first must have the money to do that. For years this government would not even participate in cash grants for the construction of hospital beds. My hon. friend from Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands recalls all this well, as I recall it.

When the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) talks about the federal contribution equalling 50 per cent of the total cost of these programs in future years—and he says it will—I have not the slightest confidence in his projections or his figures, because the whole point of the exercise is to restrict the growth of future responsibility. If that was not the point, the government would not be moving away from the 50-50 cost-sharing arrangement.