

Today Angeline Fournier, co-chairman of the committee to free Henriette Haddad, said that a high official of the Iranian embassy in Paris had told them the fundamentalist Iranian group was prepared to release her on humanitarian grounds. This group is the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

As Madame Fournier said, this is the opening of the door for the first time. They are calling upon the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs to provide help in this very delicate matter.

I would urge the government to provide full assistance to the family and friends so that very soon Henriette Haddad will indeed return home to Canada.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Prime Minister.

Provincial health ministers are meeting in Ottawa with their federal counterpart to discuss the increasing costs of our health care system and looking for ways to deal with this problem. We are very worried at this point, because Canadians know the health care system we have in this country is the best in the world. They are afraid that provincial governments want to introduce user fees which will have a very negative impact, especially on the poorest members of our society.

I therefore want to ask the Prime Minister whether he can give Canadians assurances that our national health care system will remain universal and free for all Canadians and especially for the neediest members of our society.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I have said many times that the federal government's position on health care has been the same ever since the Canada Health Act was passed.

Oral Questions

Last September in Winnipeg, at a meeting of all Canadian health ministers, the first principle to be reconfirmed by all provinces was the guarantee that the five main criteria—universality, accessibility, portability, and so forth—would be maintained. The federal government's position has not changed.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary for the minister.

I am glad to hear the minister say the government's position has not changed, but will the government make the necessary arrangements to ensure the provinces will not have to change the system?

As a result of the 1990 and 1991 budgets, the Minister of Finance has created a situation where, in a matter of just a few years, the provinces will no longer receive direct payments from the government for health care. Could the minister inform the House that the government will review this situation in order to keep in place the necessary mechanisms to maintain the integrity of our health system by continuing transfer payments to the provinces, as well as transfers of tax points?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I may remind the Leader of the Opposition that cash payments in the form of tax points were requested by the provinces when he was a member of the government, if I am not mistaken.

However, in September the provinces also admitted that considering the \$60 billion invested in the health care system in this country, which makes it the costliest public health care system in the world, it was agreed that in fact it was not a problem of resources but rather of better managing the funds available.

• (1420)

Last night, the Minister of Finance and I met HEAL, a health care lobby group. They too agreed that the problem with the health care system in Canada is not, basically, a resource problem. The money is there—\$60 billion—so it is more a matter of management. The provinces, from New Brunswick to Ontario and from Newfoundland to British Columbia, have on the whole taken on a number of responsibilities, which leads us to believe that we are on the right track. Together with the