

ing the rewards from northern resources. We cannot expect to have the advantages of exploration and development without assuming the responsibilities for health. I hope the parliamentary secretary will heed my suggestions and I hope that the federal government will take its responsibilities for the native peoples seriously and implement my suggestions.

Mr. Kaplan: Madam Speaker, I am most impressed by what the hon. member had to say, and I hope that the theme of health care of native peoples will be developed extensively in committee. Would the hon. member permit a question? From his experience, can he judge whether native health conditions are worse on Indian reservations than off the reservations? What is his experience in that regard?

Mr. Malone: Madam Speaker, I am not sure if I can give an adequate, researched response to the hon. member. I assume the hon. member is talking about conditions in the provinces, not necessarily in the north. However, data relating to northern communities shows this: the closer the proximity of native peoples to white culture, the worse is their condition of health. The situation in the provinces is somewhat different. For example, hitherto native peoples seldom ate vegetables. Now, after a somewhat lengthy transition, in many cases they include vegetables in their diet. I am afraid I cannot respond from a researched study, but the data I possess I will gladly share with the hon. member.

Mr. Max Saltzman (Waterloo-Cambridge): Madam Speaker, a few days ago a Liberal backbencher asked the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) what the minister intended to do about hospital closings in Ontario. That was a worthy question which did the hon. member credit. But the answer did not do the minister credit. The minister replied that he could do nothing since the hon. member knew very well that the matter was within provincial jurisdiction. That illustrates the fraudulent attitude to which we object. Surely the minister knows that cutting back on the federal contribution to medicare will affect the ability of the provinces to provide services. He cannot avoid his responsibilities by saying that something is under provincial jurisdiction. Obviously, the provinces depend heavily on federal funds to carry out their responsibilities. Whether this should be so is beside the point.

Perhaps it would be well to recall the time when this measure was first debated in the House. When the federal government put a very heavy hand on the provinces in order to get them into universal programs, whether hospital insurance or medical care insurance, they in fact made an implied guarantee for the future that those costs would be shared. By taking the position they are taking on this particular bill, they are renegeing on their promise to the provinces. They are breaking the word of parliament. I know that legislation is not forever. Taxation is not forever and cost-sharing is not forever. We understand this. However, they asked the provinces with good reason. I certainly supported the program, as did most members, that there should be a universal, compulsory medical system throughout Canada. This is something those of us

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who took part in the decision can be proud of. However, we cannot be proud of what the government is now doing.

● (1630)

I can appreciate that some of the costs are escalating. Most of the medical program in Canada is very worthy. It is not being abused. In comparison to other countries, our costs really are not high. When you compare the costs in Canada with those in the United States, we are doing extremely well in supplying services to people at a moderate amount of money. There are areas that have to be tightened up. Nobody argues that. However, doing it in this heavy-handed way and with this degree of arbitrariness is wrong, particularly when the federal government and the provinces are going to be meeting shortly and discussing these matters.

In listening to the arguments put forward by the government, one would assume the provinces do not have any interest in the economy. The provinces have a great interest in the economy. Even with cost-sharing, 50 per cent of the cost has to be raised by the provinces. Frankly, with the exception of a few provinces the 50 per cent the province has to raise is far more difficult for them, in terms of their ability to command tax revenues, than it is for the federal government. The provinces want to eliminate some of the abuses in the system and some of the overuse that is taking place. However, they do not want to do that in the way the federal government is proposing, saying, "We are going to put a ceiling on you and you are going to have to live with it." I am sure that given the kind of constraints that are facing the provinces, the expenditures would probably be within those ceilings that the federal government thinks are desirable.

It is not too late for the government to show some common sense in this matter. We already have enough problems in this country. There are situations when the federal government probably has no choice but to confront the provinces. There are probably instances when the provinces have no choice but to confront the federal government. However, surely this is one matter where the provinces and the federal government are not far apart except in a few areas under negotiation.

This is an area where the federal government can back off with grace. Nobody will laugh at the federal government. Nobody will say they did this because they have a minority government, or the opposition or someone else forced them to do it. As the federal government will be meeting with the provincial governments, it would be a gesture of good will and intelligence on their part to defer any action they are proposing in this bill until after the meetings with the provincial governments.

Many of our problems in this country seem to be created by pure pigheadedness rather than any inherent differences between the people involved. One of the reasons the members of my party have kept this debate going for this period of time is to try to persuade the government to see this particular point of view. It would make a great deal of sense for them to accept the arguments being put forward by the opposition—and, I am sure, the arguments of some of their own members—and defer this legislation until they have had the opportunity of meeting with the provinces.