

Canada undoubtedly has an outstanding health care system. Our public health insurance system is based on the principle of universality and accessibility of care for all Canadians.

In Canada, access to health care does not depend on one's ability to pay. In the United States, however, more than 30 million people do not have health insurance.

In conclusion, as Canadians, we are proud of our health insurance system. Three years ago, in April 1987, direct charges to patients were finally eliminated. The commitment to respect the principle of universal access to care is as strong today as when it was implemented.

I hope my answer is satisfactory to the hon. member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing.

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Vic Althouse (Mackenzie): Madam Speaker, on April 11 I rose to find the details on the farm aid program that the minister had promised would be known before Easter. I did so on April 11 because that was the last day the House sat before the Easter recess. I was curious, as are farmers right across the country, as to what sort of aid package it will be to offset the disastrous fall in net farm income that is being felt on the farms across Canada, particularly on the grain farms and those producing fur in the country.

The Minister of Agriculture at the time indicated that he had initiated discussions with the provinces and that he was attempting to raise \$1 billion by combining \$500 million of federal aid with a hoped-for equivalent amount of money from the provinces. The expectation in the farm community and among the bankers of that farm community was that in the west, at least, this would translate into a package that would amount to somewhere between \$8 and \$10 per cultivated acre.

• (1820)

That was almost seven weeks ago, one day short of seven weeks, and farmers of this country are further enlightened very little as to what that aid package will entail.

We have been told there are tentative agreements reached with some of the provinces. We have the details of the agreement reached with Alberta as to how the

sharing will occur in order to get \$89 million of federal funds. The province of Alberta will add an additional \$11 million of new money and will be credited with contributions from approximately \$78 million of existing programs to assist the income needs of Alberta farmers in the past few months.

The total there amounts to approximately \$190 million of which about \$100 million will be new money into the pockets of Alberta farmers. So far we do not know how that money will be distributed even after seven weeks of going past the deadline the minister promised.

I remind the House and the country that that disaster or shortfall has been well known for sometime. It was before Christmas at the agriculture outlook conference that we first became aware that the crop year of 1990-91 would be one in which farm incomes would be below those of previous years, that we would drop from approximately \$5 billion of net income to a net income now revised upward to something in the order of \$2.95 billion; in other words a shortfall of about \$2 billion. In response to that shortfall of \$2 billion, the federal government offered about a quarter of the damage that has been done.

In his response to me on April 11 the Minister of Agriculture and Deputy Prime Minister indicated that Canada could not match the treasuries of some of the other countries. At one point in his answer he indicated that Canada was doing much better than the Export Enhancement Program in the United States, leading one to believe that the Export Enhancement Program in the United States is the only farm subsidy program offered to that country's farmers when in fact the minister should know—and most farmers and members of the opposition realize it—that subsidy programs in the United States are far more endemic and far more expensive than that. They amount to billions of dollars, not just a few hundred millions. A portion of that money is available in the farmers' pockets to assist with seeding. They have what amounts to an interest-free storage program and an interest-free advance program where they can lock their crop into storage at harvest and get the loan rate: no interest. If the price goes up they have the option of taking the grain out of storage and realizing the difference between the locked-in price and the current market price. The total farm program in the