

In spite of a long and arduous battle, the Liberal Government did not forget its promise to patriate our Constitution and give the country its own mechanism for amending its Constitution. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does recognize English and French as the official languages of Canada and guarantees the right to education in the language of the minority. While in the United States, women are still fighting for sexual equality, our new Constitution protects Canadian women and men against any discrimination of a sexual nature. The conditions of our native people are about to change thanks to the constitutional negotiations, and we are beginning to see changes in attitudes and legal amendments introduced which will enhance the individual rights of all Canadians, including the handicapped and other minorities.

While the constitutional debate was in full swing from 1980 to 1982, the Liberal Government launched a second major undertaking, namely, the National Energy Program. Following the inflationary shock waves caused by the oil price increases which shook the world twice during the seventies, the Government took action to attain energy self-sufficiency by 1990, increase Canadian participation in these industries and protect the consumers. In 1983, Canadian oil exports showed a surplus of \$300 million and Canada shows a \$5 billion trade surplus for the whole energy sector. We have therefore reached energy self-sufficiency seven years earlier than expected. Exploration in frontier areas and off-shore is faring well. The energy conservation and oil replacement programs implemented by the Government have enabled the consumers to effect major energy savings and they have contributed to ensure uninterrupted supplies. The Petro-Canada service stations are a reminder to all Canadians that, within barely three years, the proportion of our oil industry owned by Canadians has increased from 28 to 38 per cent. The objective of 50 per cent set for 1990 will probably be easily reached.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Government has taken action to protect Canadians against the harmful effects of recession and inflation and to prepare the work force for the economic recovery. It increased by \$35 a month the Guaranteed Income Supplement to help the 1,300,000 Canadian pensioners. It increased the child tax credit to \$343 per child and doubled the authorized child care deduction from \$1,000 to \$2,000. The Government also came to the assistance of homeowners beset by the astronomical increase in mortgage rates. It developed special programs to lighten the financial burden of farmers, fishermen and small businessmen. Special programs were implemented for young people, including the National Training Act, under which the Government has allocated funds amounting to \$1.2 billion.

The Government has also found a more equitable solution to the problem of regional disparities by developing the Industrial and Regional Development Assistance Program, which will cost \$1 billion. It has undertaken to make more funds and tax incentives available for research and development, which is our

insurance policy for the future. In order to assist Canadians during the economic recovery, the Liberal Government has continued to fight inflation through its 6 and 5 per cent program within the federal public sector. This program has restored confidence at the provincial level and in the public sector, thus contributing to improved performance and production. The more recent statistics set the inflation rate at 4.9 per cent, the lowest monthly rate in the last 11 years.

Mr. Speaker, in the economic area, Canadians can look forward to 1984 with cautious optimism. The challenges of 1984 and subsequent years will be a consolidation of gains made in 1983 and the development of new opportunities to restore our economy on the path of sustained growth with job creation and an improved standard of living for all Canadians. In 1983, our economic performance was better than most of us expected. The rate of growth over the last year increased by 3 per cent and industrial production was up more than 15 per cent over its lowest level during the recession while inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index was cut by half to slightly over 4 per cent. Those impressive results should restore the confidence of both consumers and businessmen.

● (1620)

Mr. Speaker, the people of Canada were recently shocked when some provinces, more especially Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, decided to amend unilaterally the universal medicare and hospital insurance program by allowing user fees or extra billing by hospitals and physicians. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the findings of the Parliamentary Task Force which was chaired by Hon. Justice Emmett M. Hall, concerning certain problems facing Medicare.

Mr. Speaker, the Task Force found that hospital and medical insurance premiums are a sort of regressive taxation which is unfortunately being used to finance such an essential service as public health. Who could have foreseen some 10 years ago that Medicare would be the focus of a political debate. It was clear then, just as it is clear now, that most of us want a universal prepaid health care system. Now, however, the basic system is being attacked. Some of us, in increasing number, still have to pay something for services which are already paid for by our income tax. The user charge which is imposed by hospitals and the extra billing charged by physicians is undermining the foundations of Medicare.

We may have been too accommodating. After all, Medicare is one of the most visible proofs of our social progress. There is at least one whole generation who has never been exposed to another system. Under these conditions, what could we lose? What is Medicare?

First of all, Mr. Speaker, it is the right for each and every Canadian to seek and obtain anywhere in this country prepaid hospital and medical services. Medicare means that the time when sick children had to go without treatment because their parents could not afford to pay for it, is gone for good. It