

*Supply*

Has medicare improved the health of our population? Absolutely. At the time we introduced the first element of our health system, our infant mortality rate was running 40 per cent higher than Australia's, 30 per cent higher than the U.K.'s and 5 per cent higher than that of the United States.

By the end of the first year that the system was in place, our infant mortality rate was identical to Australia's and the U.K.'s and 10 per cent lower than that of the United States. Today our infant mortality rates are 20 per cent lower than the American rates and among the lowest in the world at 7.8 per 1,000 live births.

When medicare was introduced, we found that pregnant women started showing up a couple of months earlier for prenatal care than they had previously. The result is that our maternal mortality rates have dropped by a third.

It is not surprising that Canadians support their health care system, nor is it a surprise that all of Canada's political parties say that they support it too.

When I began my remarks I said that while the motion today was about medicare, the issue was the truth. By that I mean not just the false claims by members opposite that the government wished to dismantle medicare, but also whether Canada's political parties are prepared to take the measures necessary to ensure that medicare and our other social programs will still exist in the future.

In his budget, the Minister of Finance announced a tough plan to control expenditures at all levels, including money transfers to the provinces. Per capita payments under the Established Programs Financing will be frozen. Canada Assistance Plan payments will increase at a maximum of 5 per cent a year for the three richest provinces, although it remains uncontrolled for the other seven provinces. In order to protect those poorer provinces, equalization remains unchanged.

In total, transfer payments to the provinces will rise by 3.7 per cent a year for the next three years. We are not asking the provinces to follow any restrictions that we are not prepared to apply even more strictly and stringently to federal programs. Federal program spending will increase by only 3.4 per cent over the next three years.

From members opposite and from my hon. friend from Winnipeg, we have heard a great deal of apocalyptic talk: medicare is dead, they say. The sick and the poor will be thrown into the streets; the Canada Assistance Plan cannot continue.

The opposition would have Canadians believe that provincial governments cannot possibly bear the burden being imposed on them. We heard it again today from my hon. friend from Winnipeg. The facts, however, paint a very different picture. The restrictions on transfers this year will amount to one-half of one per cent of total provincial revenues. What the provinces are asked to do is to examine the other 99.5 per cent of their spending and to set priorities, just as we have done at the federal level.

If you look at all of the nations in the world which have publicly financed health care systems, you will find that Canada spends the highest percentage of GNP on its system. Each year we spend nearly \$60 billion on health. The sector employs 7 per cent of our workforce, including 57,000 physicians and a quarter of a million nurses.

You can imagine my surprise when I heard members of the opposition state on budget night that medicare in Canada is dead. Indeed, my hon. friend from Winnipeg quoted an article from the *Winnipeg Free Press* of this last weekend suggesting that the budget could have killed medicare.

I would cite to him instead another article, an editorial which appeared in his hometown newspaper, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, on February 28, 1991, under the headline: "Medicare Still Lives", the first sentence of which reads: "The death of medicare instantly proclaimed by the Liberal Party's deputy leader, Sheila Copps, and others in the wake of finance minister Michael Wilson's budget is not after all imminent".

We can all choose to cite selectively what articles or editorials we would like to have quoted on the floor of the House of Commons. I would hope that when my hon. friend is reading his hometown newspaper, he would read what they say in their editorials as well as what they run on their op-ed pages.

It is simply not true when members opposite suggest that medicare is dead, but to survive it needs to be built on a sound economic foundation. Simply running up