

*Government Orders*

It is being strongly opposed by some special interest groups, especially some of the private hospitals. I think if we in this country do not safeguard the system we have in Canada, such a superb system that it is but feeling the strains as I say, we make it much more difficult for those in the debate in the United States.

Their opponents will be able to look to Canada and see the problems in Canada. They will see the strains in Canada in our medicare system and say: "This is something that just comes with the public health care system as opposed to what it really is: something which comes with irresponsible funding provisions from a federal government to that public system".

**Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak in opposition to Bill C-20 put forward by the government.

I must begin by saying that I listened to the previous speech of the member from Essex—Windsor. I agreed with nearly everything that New Democratic Party member said. I hope the member can take his words today and pass them on to his friends at Queen's Park in the province of Ontario where I come from, because I like him share the view that the Canada Health Act is central to our vision of Canada. Any effort to dismantle or cut back in the maintenance and preservation of our health care system is really weakening the basic value system of this country.

I realize that the province of Ontario is in a very difficult position here. From the beginning of this Health Act, this has been a national government initiative. It has always been the national government that has taken the lead in terms of our national health care system.

Quite frankly, during the last election in my particular community one of the reasons that I was concerned about the Meech Lake Accord was the fact that the national standards of national institutions were in jeopardy.

• (1730)

A lot of us could see and sense that this approach of the current government of pushing things off on to the provinces was going to break these national services down.

Those of us who had concerns and who wanted amendments to Meech Lake were not anti-Quebec, but we could see in this document areas that were vulnerable. I believe this is a prime example where the national government is risking something that is core, something that is fundamental to the value system of this country. The value system I am referring to is one of Canada being a nation that is caring and compassionate. We have always exemplified that through the maintenance of our national health care system, with national standards that ensured every region of this country and every citizen of this country had access to universal medicare.

I listened earlier this evening to the minister responsible for privatization. He said that last week they listened to some experts when they were doing some pre-budget consultations in Toronto. These experts were telling the government that it was right on track, just keep going the way it was going, it was right on track. I have to say that I would like to know who these experts are and what track they are on.

I see the member here today from Don Valley East who I know is concerned about this issue because in his riding, and I share with him the responsibility, is the East General Hospital. The East General Hospital, which is one of the largest hospitals in downtown Toronto, is currently suffering from low morale. It is incredibly difficult for the professionals there to maintain the quality service that has built their reputation. It is primarily driven because of the lack of budget, the lack of resources to give the kind of professional service that has always been a standard in this country and which has always made us so unique.

As some members said earlier, people come from all over the world to study our medicare system. Right at the time when other countries want to convert to our system, we seem to be tampering with a process that is leading to it being undermined, which ultimately could lead to a second-class, second-rate system.

Therefore, I think it is very important that we focus on this issue. Our medicare system is something that has galvanized us as a country. It is something that has always given us great pride. It seems to me that whenever this government is faced with the arguments of fiscal responsibility, its immediate action is just to automatically cut, cut, cut.