

Government Orders

the amount of pain and suffering in the community, decrease the cost to the economy, decrease insurance costs and so on.

It is in fact a win-win situation. To anyone who would argue that this a two-tier system, I say to them that anybody in this country involved in health care will say that there is a two-tier system in this country right now.

The most important thing that the government needs to do with respect to health care is as I said before get their fiscal house in order. Until we get our spending under control as a nation we simply cannot afford to support social programs in the current state of affairs that we have. To not do that I think would be morally reprehensible and a tragedy for the Canadian people.

• (1935)

The last thing I would like to touch on for a moment is decreasing tobacco taxes. I feel this is an indefensible situation. Every year the cost to the country in terms of smoking is horrendous. It costs billions and billions of dollars. There is a loss of productivity and an increase in health care costs. Over 40,000 people in this country die of smoking related illnesses.

To increase the cost of cigarettes has resulted, as has been proven, in a decrease in consumption especially among the young. Therefore I suggest that instead of decreasing taxes on tobacco that we maintain them; and instead of caving in to the criminals who are engaging in this smuggling activity I would also suggest that we add an export tax to cigarettes going into other countries.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I enjoyed the member's remarks but my curiosity was peaked by his comments about the Canada Health Act. It brought back vivid memories of the election campaign last fall when underlying many of the public meetings we had in our riding were questions about the future of our health system under a regime which might include Reform Party proposals.

I would ask the member to tell this House if he really believes that weakening in any way the Canada Health Act, in any way dismantling the thrust and the strength of that legislation to protect this country, that we can put our full faith in the provinces to maintain a national system.

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his comment.

As the elected members of the provincial legislatures are answerable to the Canadian public it would be political suicide for them to create a health care situation where the people who elected them to office would suffer.

It behoves every elected individual in this country to face the writing on the wall, to realize that we have a situation where health care costs are increasing at four times the rate of economic growth and governments are dealing with deficit spending with less and less money being applied to health care.

We have to face up to this. It is not just dismantling or destroying the Canada Health Act, it is modifying it to make it a better situation. To accept the current situation as it is now is to merely stick one's head in the sand. It is incumbent upon all of us to do something about it in order to preserve essential health care services for all Canadians so that they are not going to suffer, they are going to have their operation and they are not going to die as they do down in the United States due to lack of care.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca has replied to the question I put to his predecessor who, by the way, left his parents to get married. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca said:

[English]

"The federal government is preventing the provinces from putting health care under control by threatening to cut transfer payments". And he is right.

[Translation]

I like what the hon. member said because it is exactly what we feel in Quebec. This means that, both in the West and in the East, the federal government threatens the very principles of universality and accessibility. And that is a serious problem. A few moments ago the question was asked as to whether the provinces were in a better position to maintain these principles. Let us take a good look at the situation: in the last ten years or so, the federal government has been systematically cutting transfer payments and has now become the biggest threat to universality and accessibility.

• (1940)

[English]

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca): Mr. Speaker, it is important for the hon. opposition member to understand that health care services are pulling the wool over the eyes of the Canadian public by instituting a concept called rationing. That means they are telling hospitals how many hips or bypass surgeries they can do. As a result the Canadian public is being deprived of service under the guise of so-called universality. In this current situation people who need essential health care services are not getting them because of the rationing and the withdrawal of services.