

*Canada Health Act*

dearth of funds in the health care system. The eradication of extra billing and user fees may have its merits, but by neglecting to recognize that these practices are in themselves responses to the underfunding of the system, the Bill does little to ensure the preservation of medicare.

The third inadequacy that I want to discuss might best be termed as the short-sightedness of the Bill. The Canada Health Act does nothing to encourage the reforms in the health care delivery system that are increasingly being recognized as essential to controlling costs while at the same time maintaining high quality health care. By concentrating exclusively on a deceptively narrow aspect of medicare, namely the fiscal flow of money from Ottawa to the provinces, the Government has missed an opportunity to take the progressive stand on medicare that may be necessary.

I should like to deal with the first of my concerns now, namely, the process. The preservation and improvement of medicare is an objective of the utmost priority for all Canadians. We in the Progressive Conservative Party have a keen sense of the need for a strong and permanent program of medicare as well as a respect for the benefits which such a program bestows on Canadians in the form of health and well-being. We are in perfect agreement with the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) when she stated, as she did in response to a question put by the health critic for the NDP in 1982 as reported in *Hansard* on June 11, 1982, at page 18375, as follows:

I would like to repeat that he must understand if he is sincere in wanting to strengthen medicare once and for all, that confrontation is over. He must understand co-operation and collaboration . . . The provinces must work together with the federal Government on medicare and not get into a confrontation situation which, of course, makes better headlines.

I do not doubt the Hon. Minister's sincerity in wanting to strengthen medicare. Yet, somehow in the process of bringing before us the Canada Health Act, she has deviated remarkably from the very admonition of which she so fervently spoke less than two years ago. I ask, what co-operation has the Minister herself exemplified to allow the *Ottawa Citizen* to report, in its lead editorial on December 16 last year as follows:

The federal Government is using its financial clout to force the provinces to comply with its version of universality. Compulsion rather than co-operation has never been a formula for political peace in Canada.

When we hear people such as Dr. Gerald Sheehy, Minister of Health in Nova Scotia and until recently Chairman of the Conference of the Provincial Health Ministers, testifying that the provinces have been "handcuffed from day one" in their attempts to negotiate with the federal Government on the Canada Health Act, do we not have just cause to question the Government's commitment to "co-operation and collaboration"?

On numerous occasions we are reassured by the Minister in the House that the provinces would be the first to receive a draft of the Act and that there would be ample opportunity for discussion before the Bill was tabled. The examples are legion and include passages in *Hansard* on March 17, 1983, at page 23878; on February 8, 1983, at page 22621; on June 23, 1983, at page 26721; and the proceedings of the Standing Commit-

tee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, issue No. 29, March 29, 1983, at page 26.

The record of the Minister in following through on her promises is now clear. Not a word of true consultation with the provinces was ever to take place. Shortly before the Bill was tabled, the Hon. Tom Wells, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs in Ontario, as reported in the *Toronto Star* of November 11, wrote to her as follows:

I am dismayed by press reports which suggest you have withdrawn your commitment to consult with me and my provincial colleagues before introducing changes in medicare to the provinces.

The press reports were correct. Even after bringing the new legislation before Parliament, the Minister refused to meet with the provincial Health Ministers, as a group, as they had asked. Instead, she deigned to meet with them individually to discuss the Bill, but even then made it clear that she was unwilling to negotiate in any substantial sense.

Perhaps the Minister will wish to cite her meeting with the provincial Ministers in Halifax last fall. I would remind the House that the early September meeting only highlighted the breakdown in communications between the Minister and the provinces. It was characterized by the Alberta Health Minister, the Hon. David Russell, in a report in the *Ottawa Citizen* on September 8, as "Alice in Wonderland and a complete waste of time", a sentiment that was shared by the rest of the participants.

Since it is a joint endeavour, the importance of a harmonious relationship between the federal and provincial Governments for the integrity of medicare cannot be overstated. The merits of Bill C-3, notwithstanding, no federal piece of legislation can ensure the future of medicare so long as there is distrust and animosity between the two levels of Government. Furthermore, the manner in which this Government has alienated physicians is perhaps as great a threat to medicare as any which this Bill seeks to diffuse.

I might say that the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie) seems to forget that entirely and seems to be on a real kick to devastate the physician population of this country. I think the day will come when he will rue taking that position.

By ignoring the concerns of doctors, the Minister may have temporarily scored some political points, but she certainly has not acted in the long-term interests of Canadians. It remains clear to anyone with a balanced and dispassionate perspective on this debate that the practitioners of health care are a group without whose co-operation and, indeed, without whose enthusiasm, the health care system that Canadians have enjoyed cannot function.

The utter failure of the Government to procure an adequate dialogue with the provinces and with the doctors, has put in jeopardy not only the ultimate success of the Bill, but the future of medicare itself. We in this Party are committed to upholding the principles of medicare as set out in the Bill. It is in this interest that we condemn the Government's cavalier attitude and callous disregard for these vital concerns.