

The Address—Mr. Knowles

this young woman should be given credit for having written the final letter, the one that did the trick.

As I say, Mr. Speaker, that was an extremely interesting routine that was pursued, and we are all delighted that at long last the efforts of many other people to get something for disabled persons bore fruit because of the writing of this letter by this young lady.

I think hon. members will realize that there is in my mind a question. I should like to know who could write the Prime Minister a letter asking for health insurance that would do the trick. Apparently the Prime Minister is a human being. Apparently when the plight of people is really presented to him in a way that impresses itself upon him, he uses his authority as Prime Minister to say "Something must be done about this". Apparently the appeals of members of parliament on the floor of the House of Commons and the appeals expressed in motions that have been made across the years by this party—and which are now made by the Progressive Conservative party—do not have the effect on the Prime Minister that we think they should have. I hope my having told this story of a letter from a young woman in Sherbrooke that did the trick with regard to disability pensions will have the result that someone in this country who feels personally the need for a national health insurance program will write to the Prime Minister personally the kind of letter that he will see and that will do the trick.

Mr. Blair: You write it.

Mr. Knowles: The hon. member for Lanark suggests that I myself write the letter. I should be glad—

Mr. Rowe: Let the same girl write it.

Mr. Knowles: It does not matter who writes the letter. What we want is to get action on this important question.

I congratulate our friends to the right, the members of the Progressive Conservative party, on having added a nation-wide program of health insurance to their amendment which they presented to the house yesterday. Despite the fact that in the past they voted sometimes one way and sometimes the other on this question, I dare to hope that this time they will vote for it and that that will impress upon the government the fact that there is in this country a growing feeling that the time has come to have a nation-wide program of health insurance.

I noticed the answer the Prime Minister made to this request yesterday. It is the same answer he has made on a number of occasions. Referring to health insurance as

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requested in the amendment before the house, as reported on page 34 of *Hansard* he said this:

It certainly is something that is highly desirable. It is something that we would all like to see done. However, our progress in the development of welfare services in Canada has been fairly rapid over the last few years.

That is his view, not mine. It seems to me that it has taken a long while to get such progress as we have achieved. The Prime Minister continued:

Any further implementation would require the spending, through government agencies, of a larger portion of the incomes of individuals. That is something which will come, but the timing of it will depend upon the circumstances of the Canadian economy generally.

Mr. Speaker, I think it has been demonstrated by those who have gone into this question—it was brought out in the report of our old age security committee of 1950, and you can find it in material that has been produced on this subject by the Department of National Health and Welfare—that if you establish a nation-wide program of health insurance you are not going to spend much more money in the total than is now being spent on the health of our people, but rather that you are going to spend it in a fairer and more logical manner, and that you are going to see to it that people get health care according to their need for it rather than according to the state of their purses.

I suggest that if the Prime Minister can say as he did yesterday, with regard to a plan that will bring health services and hospital care to all Canadians, that it is something that is highly desirable; if he can say it is something we would all like to see done, he is the same man who, when he received the letter from this young woman in Sherbrooke, realized he could do something about that problem. He can do something about a nation-wide program of health insurance this session, and I call upon him to do so, certainly in the life of this parliament.

I make once again the appeal that many of us have been making in the house, that we in this group have been making persistently throughout the years, that this is the step in the field of welfare legislation that must next be taken; and that if we are going to claim to be a modern, progressive, civilized country it should be taken without further delay. I congratulate the Prime Minister on his response to the appeal that came to him in the letter from that young woman in Sherbrooke. I hope he will realize that there are thousands of Canadians who are looking to him to do something about this important question of health insurance, and on their behalf I call upon him to do something about it at this session of parliament.