

Canada Health Act

position on the Western Grain Transportation Act. The solution of the Official Opposition was to do nothing for three more years.

Mr. Epp: We would have all been better for it.

Mr. McCauley: That is really taking a stand. At least the New Democratic Party had the intestinal fortitude to stick with its original position. As NDP Members saw it, it was a position of principle.

Mr. Thacker: Why didn't you stick to your original position?

Mr. McCauley: The people of Atlantic Canada watched the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Mulroney) attack the National Energy Program which has been of so much benefit to the people of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. The list of obstructionist tactics by the Official Opposition goes on and on. It was opposition for the sake of opposition; destructive opposition for the sake of opposition.

Finally and amazingly, the Official Opposition is now in full support of this Bill. Why? Because even the Official Opposition, wonder of wonders, knows that it cannot play games with the health of Canadians. The Canadian people will not stand for it. They will not tolerate children rushing from behind curtains, vis-à-vis this Bill. Canadians will not tolerate bells ringing when it comes to this Bill. This Bill ensures that all Canadians will receive proper health care. The vast majority of Canadians support it fully. A poll which I conducted in my own riding indicated that 84 per cent of the people who responded were in favour of a publicly funded system of health care in Canada. I believe that opinion is typical of Canadians throughout this land.

I noted with great interest an editorial which appeared Tuesday in a certain right-wing Toronto newspaper chastising the Opposition Leader for his support of the Canada Health Act. Apparently the right-wing legions out there are incensed, many of whom are members of the Conservative Party. We have all read the polls conducted by the Tories of their convention delegates which indicate that 82 per cent felt that funding for medicare could be reduced or kept at current levels. It seems to me the Tories have a problem. This view of Tory delegates contradicts what the Leader of the Opposition stated publicly and what the Hon. Member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) stated in the Chamber last Monday. Whom are we to believe? What is the real position over there? I suggest that the sacred trust about which the Opposition Leader speaks with regard to medicare is little more than a friendship of convenience, to be trotted before the Canadian public only when Tory backs are up against the wall.

● (1420)

Given the recent potential for further erosion of medicare in Canada, it was urgent that steps be taken to protect medicare. The Government of Canada has a social responsibility to ensure that no one in the nation wants for medical care. This is not a gift to be disposed of by whim but a social right of every

citizen. Health care in Canada today is not better just because we have more and better doctors, just because we have more hospitals or are committing more public funds than ever to this essential service. Canadians receive better health care today because humane social policies, Liberal policies, formed the foundation of medicare.

The Canada Health Act renews a commitment made to Canadians that freedom of access, equality and administrative efficiency would be the hallmarks of publicly financed health services. I would like to speak about freedom of access for a moment. If access to quality health care was not a right, who would be the first to suffer? It would be the poor and the elderly. Who would wish to see a two-tiered system in Canada where one's state of health would be determined by one's financial resources? Poor and rich alike should have equal access to medical care when they are sick.

Federal-provincial financing of medical services has resulted in administrative efficiency as well. Today we have a substantially greater number of physicians and hospital facilities, and a more equitable distribution of both than would have resulted in a health system dominated by private insurance. Having one plan reduces administrative costs, eases the fears of the ill and simplifies the delivery of health services. Voices from the right call for privatization of the Canadian health system, and these same voices attack the Canada Health Act because it proposes financial penalties for those provinces which allow user fees and extra billing.

We have heard the arguments—user fees deter frivolous use of medical services and extra billing provides an infusion of cash into the national health system. I, for one, am tired of listening to those arguments. There is no evidence to support the claim that hospital services are being abused. We know from the report of the Hall Commission that hospital user fees deter the sick, the poor and the elderly from obtaining medical treatment. However, is that what we want? I think not.

Recently the New Brunswick Minister of Health gave a ringing endorsement of user fees by stating that visits to outpatient departments have fallen by 16 per cent since the imposition of user fees in that province. Also the Health Minister announced that the revenue from these fees for the first year should approach some \$3.4 million. It is true that people may have been deterred—the poor and the old—but the claims of savings are very suspect. The Government of New Brunswick is operating under a fiscal illusion. Money is saved only if alternate care is not sought. We must then look at the costs of seeking that alternate care or, of greater importance, the costs of forgoing care. In this case lack of treatment could cause serious illness. Indeed this is false economy. Further I remind the Government of New Brunswick that its calculations are based upon a partial study; this its brave estimate of perceived savings presents a shaky argument for regressive fees.

For Canadians the cost of extra billing in 1983 was \$72 million. This is unacceptable. Canadians should not have to pay again for a service they have already paid for. The arguments for extra billing are as fallacious as those for user