

HEALTH AND WELFARE

MEDICARE PROGRAM—ANNOUNCED INCREASES IN PREMIUMS BY BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. Mark Rose (Mission-Port Moody): Madam Speaker, I have a very important question that I should like to address to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Is the minister aware that the province of British Columbia has just announced an increase of approximately 15 per cent in medicare premiums and, further, 20 to 40 per cent in daily charges to patients for hospital visits? If so, will she get in touch with the government of British Columbia and tell that government that these regressive, reactionary increases are unacceptable to the federal government under both the medicare and hospital legislation?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, that information has not been confirmed officially to me yet. I have a meeting tonight on that question, at my request.

Mr. Rose: A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. Once the information is confirmed, since the government has tied further increases in health care fees to the cost of living and since these increases are irresponsible, shocking and pick the pockets of the poor and the old, would the minister be prepared to take immediate action along the lines that she proposed when she was in opposition—that is, give notice to B.C. that she intends to cut off federal funding unless and until the medicare guidelines of universality and comprehensiveness are reinstated?

Mrs. Bégin: Madam Speaker, not until the report of Mr. Justice Hall has been presented. I am sorry to be late for the question period this afternoon but I was finishing a meeting with Mr. Justice Hall where we discussed these problems.

My objective and that of the government is not to enter into confrontation with B.C. for the fun of it; the problem is far deeper. I think the hon. member knows that it is far deeper than just these signs we have seen in some provinces which, by the way, are being corrected.

I want to remind the hon. member of the beautiful job the population—and, of course, the Liberal opposition—did in New Brunswick in correcting that situation. I think it is proper that we talk of it right now in this public forum of the House, but we are not ready to withhold payments at this point in time. The Hall commission's work is to advise us on this very subject.

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COMMUNICATIONS

EARTH SATELLITE STATION AT B.C. LEGISLATURE—INQUIRY AS TO PROSECUTION

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Communications. On Friday the minister threatened to lay charges against

Oral Questions

the owners and operators of unlicensed earth stations. On Monday the B.C. government put up an earth station on the grounds of the legislature in Victoria. When the minister makes these threats about prosecutions of owners and operators of unlicensed earth stations, does that include the earth station on the lawns of the B.C. legislature?

Hon. Francis Fox (Secretary of State and Minister of Communications): Madam Speaker, there seems to be a lot of confusion about the installation of the earth satellite station at the B.C. legislature. For instance, it was reported on the national news last night that all such earth stations are illegal. As you know full well, Madam Speaker, they are not. As long as an earth station is licensed it is, indeed, a legal earth station.

In answer to the hon. member's question, I should like to tell him that the British Columbia government made an application for a licence some time ago and that this licence was issued in due course.

Mr. Beatty: A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. We learn from the Minister of Communications that he does not intend to lay charges against the B.C. government. That leaves several thousand Canadians in rural and remote areas, particularly in northern Canada, to be considered. In view of the fact that the reason people in so many northern and remote areas are putting up unlicensed earth stations is that they want to receive the same variety of signals as are available to people in southern and urban areas, may I ask if the minister is prepared today to order a stay of prosecution against people living in such communities until such time as Canadian signals are available to provide the same variety of programming to them that is available to people in southern Canada? Will he put an end to the sort of discrimination which takes place when the government allows such signals into southern Canada but forbids rural and northern Canadians from receiving a variety of signals?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Fox: Madam Speaker, I am delighted to hear "hear, hear" coming from across the floor, because the policy we are pursuing at present is the policy that was pursued by the Leader of the Opposition's government and by my immediate predecessor in this portfolio.

An hon. Member: Nonsense.

Mr. Fox: There were no prosecutions at that stage.

Mr. Clark: That is right. That is the point.

Mr. Fox: It was a question of tolerance, not a question of issuing licences.

I should like to get back to the answer I gave last week to members of this House. On this side of the House we are interested in getting to the root of the problem. That is why we are hoping that the CRTC, through its present hearings on the problem of extension of TV services to northern communities