

I recognize that some members are reading into this particular motion and into the present situation in the federal-provincial negotiations the idea that the federal government is saying that it does not intend to get involved in pharmacare, denticare, care for eyeglasses, or whatever. This question has not been taken into consideration at the present time. I think it is felt that before we become involved in these areas, we need some agreement with the provinces. As a matter of fact, in previous negotiations the provinces asked us to give a commitment that we would not enter into any new, broad program such as denticare or pharmacare without consultation with them and without a consensus that it was also a priority of theirs. They do not want the federal government to push them into this area. I think they have a point, because they have priorities too and we should respect them.

So, Mr. Speaker, this formula is not designed to take care of any financial expenditures that the provinces may incur in the area of denticare or pharmacare, because if they wish to go in that direction we would want to discuss it and negotiate what kind of arrangements should be made without any reference to the formula we have proposed. This formula does not in any way prohibit our becoming involved in cost-sharing in those areas if agreement is reached with the provinces in the future that this should be done.

Health Care

In my view, if anyone in this country is really trying to opt out of health care in the federal sphere, it is the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield). In a statement made in the province of Quebec he said—I think I have it correctly—that the federal government must withdraw from shared-cost health programs and give the provinces a greater share of fiscal resources with an appropriate system of equalization. If that is not a suggestion that we drop out of this area and fail to provide the kind of leadership we have provided in the past, I do not know what is. He is proposing a new kind of tax-sharing arrangement with the provinces. It may be different in amount, in terms of the 6 per cent or in a couple of other details. However, the Leader of the Opposition may be proposing something different but for a different reason, because he is saying. "If I were the federal leader of this country I would get out of this field."

We are not saying that. We are saying that we will negotiate with the provinces to arrive at a suitable arrangement which would allow the kind of flexibility that would maintain national standards across the country for the benefit of all Canadians, and that we are going to stay in the health field. We are determined to stay because we feel that although it is largely a provincial responsibility, the federal government has a great deal of input and leadership in the field. I think we have proven that in the past, Mr. Speaker.

At 5 p.m. the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Standing Order.