

Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements Act

that relationship seemed to very much centre around this financial transaction called extra billing. That that exchange of money is more sacred to the professional doctor-patient relationship than making themselves available to their patients, is a mystery to me. If the doctors had any remaining claim to professional integrity, they would not have gone on strike in the first place.

Mr. Benjamin: Will my hon. friend explain the implications of this legislation on the provinces in terms of their ability to negotiate fees with the medical profession, which is a perfectly legitimate subject for the medical profession to discuss with hospitals and with governments at all three levels? 2100 Would the Hon. Member tell us if the decrease in the increase, what this Bill calls for, does in fact inhibit the provinces from reaching settlements with the medical profession in all provinces and, particularly at this moment, in Ontario, because of the decreased amount of funds the provinces can look forward to over the next two or three years?

• (2100)

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, of course, the decrease in the increase will have that effect not just in Ontario but in all provinces. I think what has to be realized is that it is very easy, when one talks about federal transfer payments, to get caught up in what the effect will be next year or even the year after. But what needs to be noticed in this debate—and I have paid some attention to this issue over the years, and was on the task force of federal-provincial financial payments in 1981—is the structural changes which are effected by successive federal Governments on the original 50/50 partnership. We said then that even though there was a time when it looked like the provinces were getting the better part of the deal because the federal Government was spending 60 per cent, 65 per cent and even 70 per cent in some provinces, if my memory serves me correctly, of the money spent on health care, the long-term trend in a block funding structure was in favour of the federal Government, particularly because of the established practice that the federal Government could act unilaterally. That was established regrettably by the Liberal Government and the Conservatives are now picking up on it.

That means we have a system which has to carry on, no matter what, and the federal Government can act unilaterally to reduce its share of the partnership, leaving the provinces in the very situation, to be historically accurate, in which a lot of Progressive Conservative premiers predicted they would be in in the late 1960s, when they did not want to go into medicare in the first place. They said they would just get in there and the federal Government would back out and leave them holding the bag.

The provinces are not yet completely holding the bag, but the way it is set up now, the provinces will be left holding the bag. Those Tory premiers of the late 1960s were not all wrong. The reason they were not all wrong is because of the actions of the Liberal federal Government in the early 1980s and now, ironically, the actions of a Conservative Government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Debate.

Mr. Dave Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise to debate Bill C-96. Earlier this evening I had an opportunity to meet with several distinguished Canadians over dinner, some of whom have a very profound interest in the subject matter we are debating tonight. I happened to take a few notes in summarizing some of the points they wished me to make with regard to Bill C-96. For the edification of Hon. Members of the House, I would like to describe very briefly what those concerns are. Knowing of your great interest in the subject matter, Mr. Speaker, I am certain without qualification, and I say this with great respect to you, Sir, you would not want to disagree with the proposition I am going to put forward at this time. The summary of that gathering earlier this evening alludes to five points. Collectively, I think they would have a very profound effect on all Hon. Members of the House.

I have to say at the outset that I am somewhat disturbed, if not appalled, as I look across the aisle. I am not going to mention the absence of Ministers of the Crown. That is not my intention, but I have to say in terms of the quality as well as the quantity of Hon. Members opposite, particularly Ministers of the Crown, there is a lot to be desired. I shall leave it at that.

I will now summarize the points this distinguished delegation made to me earlier in the evening. They believe that the federal Government should not cut its contributions to post-secondary education because Canada is experiencing fundamental technology changes and our youth need more training and education to adequately face tomorrow's challenges. The federal Government should not have cut its contributions to health care since the Canadian population is aging and new sophisticated medical equipment is costly.

The federal Government failed to respect the five-year tradition of the federal-provincial agreements. The federal Government should review its priorities. On the one hand, it has reimbursed the uninsured depositors of failed banks, exempted capital gains from taxation, gradually stopped taxing oil and gas in the producing provinces and increased RRSP deductions. On the other hand, it is cutting health care and post-secondary education. Finally, the group asked me to convey to Hon. Members of the House that the federal Government should have convened a federal-provincial summit to reform the 1977 EPF Act to ensure that all transfers are effectively used by the provinces for health care and post-secondary education. That, very succinctly, describes their concerns. It describes the concerns Canadians from coast to coast have with regard to Bill C-96.

In debating the substance of this particular Bill, I think I have to take strong exception to some of the propositions and rhetoric being advocated by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Vincent). I know he is a young individual who is aspiring to become a Member of the Cabinet. However, when one stands in his place as a Parliamentary