

Oral Questions

that she is in the lobby. I told her parliamentary secretary that I wanted to ask a question, but he disappeared.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blaikie: I would like to know just what is going on. Perhaps someone could bring the minister in from the lobby so I could ask my question on the state of medicare.

An hon. Member: Your question isn't very important.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member must address his question to a minister. I see the Minister of National Health and Welfare coming into the House now.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blaikie: Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Health and Welfare is looking more and more every day like Emperor Nero who stood passively by and fiddled while Rome burned before his eyes. The minister seems content to blather on intermittently while our national health care system goes to pieces before our very eyes.

It has been one and a half years since the Hall report was tabled, three years since the medicare crisis first began, and six months since the all-party parliamentary task force tabled its report. The minister is up to her ears in recommendations. We have seen no action but we have had plenty of excuses. Will the minister please tell the House what arrangements she has made with her provincial counterparts to sit down and establish some concrete national standards for Canada's medicare system?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, I could, for example, answer the hon. member by asking him whether he knows where the newly elected minister of health for Manitoba stands on medicare. That answer would be very practical for all of us.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Miss Bégin: It would tell us how much extra billing he thinks will have to take place to erode the system. Is the minister going to take a stand? He is one of the key players. He is a minister of the same party to which the hon. member belongs. Has the hon. member contacted him? I would be very interested, as would many Canadians, to know if there is a change in group dynamics between health ministers as to policy. We have decided to strengthen medicare. That would be one good step he could take.

REMUNERATION OF DOCTORS—GOVERNMENT POSITION ON
EXTRA BILLING

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Madam Speaker, the position of the Saskatchewan government and the position of the Manitoba government are well known with regard to extra billing. If the minister would show some leadership, we would have some action right away. I do not know how long she thinks she can go on with this cute stuff about Manitoba

and Saskatchewan, because it does not wash with anybody but herself.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Blaikie: The minister is on record as favouring a revision of the Medical Care Act to state clearly that extra billing by physicians is against the intention and spirit of medicare. We have doctors extra billing in Alberta. We have doctors asking for a 35 per cent increase in Manitoba. The remuneration of physicians is at the heart of the problem of medicare.

How does the minister plan to address this issue? Never mind what the position is of the minister of health in Manitoba; what is her position? How does she plan to create a national consensus against extra billing and a mechanism to provide adequate compensation for doctors as Dr. Hall recommended? Does the minister have any specific proposals?

Mr. Nielsen: On all four sides of the issue.

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, I think that the position and the stand taken by the other ministers who are key players in the medicare system matter a great deal. There are ten of them. There is one national government speaking on behalf of Canadians and putting up approximately half of the total amount of money involved. It would be nice to have a few allies when I start the federal-provincial conference I am planning with my counterparts, so the question I raised with the hon. member is very relevant, I would like to underline that.

● (1440)

Other than that, the member should know, because I think I stated it a few times in answers to him, that we are planning the first of a series of conferences on renewing medicare, at which time I will put to my provincial colleagues the new rules of the game to strengthen medicare. He knows this is not a simple black and white matter where we can suddenly withhold payment and slow down services. I do not see how that would help people who have health problems.

Mr. Blaikie: You said that; I did not. Get on with your job.

Miss Bégin: It is true that we are manoeuvring around these various roadblocks in order to strengthen medicare, and I believe in the last two years we have strengthened medicare in Canada.

FEDERAL FUNDING

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Madam Speaker, the minister knows that at this very moment her colleague, the Minister of Finance, is trying to negotiate massive reductions in federal funding to the provinces which will have an incredible effect on health care, not to mention post-secondary education. I ask the minister does she intend to sit idly by and let the Minister of Finance carelessly gamble with the future