

Supply

What we have before us here in the form of the NDP motion is a motion which says that we do not accept that way of looking at the problem, that cutbacks and user fees are sort of equivalent.

• (1150)

I will try to explain why we do take genuine offence at the suggestion by Liberal premiers that user fees are somehow the solution to the problem.

What we are talking about here is problem and solution. The problem in the first place is unilateral federal cutbacks to health care dollars, a violation of the agreements, written and political, which existed in the 1960s and 1970s with respect to medicare being a federally and provincially cost shared program.

That is the source of the problem, and I say to the hon. member that it has its origin in the Liberal government of which he was a part, and in which he may even have been a cabinet minister in his dying days.

It was the Liberal government of 1982 which brought in the first unilateral cutback to Establish Programs Financing. The same government went to a great deal of trouble through the Canada Health Act to prevent user fees.

Obviously the Liberal government of that day, whether this member accepted it or not at that time, made a distinction between cutbacks and user fees. The same government cut back on health care dollars but at the same time brought in tough legislation to deal with user fees. That government then made a distinction, which the member was unwilling to make today, between the effect that user fees have, not just on the practical, but also on the philosophical underpinnings of medicare and the effect that cutbacks have.

I would agree that at some point cutbacks themselves become a threat to medicare. If your publicly funded health care system is so devastated, so much a shell of its former self that people come to think negatively about it, then that becomes an attack on medicare by virtue of the fact that people then begin to want and seek out alternatives to that publicly funded health care system.

Cutbacks can be a threat to medicare in and of themselves. The cutbacks we have seen, which began in

1982 but which accelerated under the Progressive Conservative Party starting in 1984, are a threat to medicare.

An even greater threat to medicare is when premiers, whether they be Liberal or anybody else, and in this case they happen to be Liberals, say that the solution to that problem is the reintroduction of user fees. That is where there is, I would hope we can admit here, a genuine distinction to be made between the problem, which is federal cutbacks to the provinces, which in turn leads to provincial cutbacks in health care services, and a legitimate disagreement about what the response should be to that reality. Some Liberal premiers have suggested that user fees are part of the legitimate response to that problem.

What we are saying here today is that we reject that as part of the solution. We reject it because it is part and parcel of what we have always been about, and that makes us different from the Liberals. We do not have a history. It is not the NDP in Saskatchewan that fought the introduction of medicare the way they did at that time.

There is a mixed bag over there when it comes to medicare, although it was a Liberal government that brought in medicare in the 1960s. This is to be acknowledged, but it was not something that the Liberals would have done if it had not been for the pressure brought to bear on them by the existence already of medicare in Saskatchewan, and by the fact that they had minority governments at that time and pressure was brought to bear on them by the NDP in the House at that time.

This is all a matter of historical record and is not designed to take away from the fact that I am sure there were some Liberals at the time who were genuinely keen on finally bringing into reality the promise that the Liberals had made at their convention in 1919.

The fact is that there is a distinction to be made between introduction of user fees and other ways of solving the problem that we now have.

The real solution is the reintroduction of full federal cost sharing. The solution is to restore the partnership. The solution is to not have the federal government slowly but surely getting out of the business of living up to its commitment to these federally and provincially cost shared programs.