

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, May 15, 1995

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

HEALTH INSURANCE AND SERVICES

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North, Ref.) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider allowing the provinces greater flexibility in the provision of health insurance and services.

She said: Mr. Speaker, the request in my motion is simple. The Reform Party, like all Canadians, Canadian political parties, Canadians working in health care and a multitude of other Canadians, including the provincial premiers, recognizes the provinces have been delegated legal and constitutional responsibility to provide health insurance and services in Canada.

As the provision of health services and insurance has been delegated to the provinces, I am asking they be given the authority to achieve it or to carry it out.

The actual delegating of this task is not the hard part. The giving up of the authority over the actual control of how the task is carried out is the hard part. Unless the delegator, the federal government, is willing and able to devise the plan, update it as necessary and authorize each aspect of it prior to its implementation, in which case this is not feasible, the delegator must be prepared to delegate out some authority and in order to achieve what they want they identify what is to be achieved by the provinces, what components or principles are to be included and what standards of performance are expected. Then they give the authority necessary for the provinces to achieve this.

As a national government we can legislate these guidelines, standards or principles, or both, or whatever else we should call them. We have done this via the Canada Health Act. We have established five fundamental principles to be incorporated by each province in its approach to providing health insurance and services. The principles are accessibility, comprehensiveness, portability, public administration and universality.

The Reform Party believes these are sound national principles. The problem is not the principles themselves but the accompanying description or definition applied to each of them. For example, in the act the definition or interpretation of accessibility includes only one aspect of what access to care can actually mean, based on a person's ability to pay. That is commendable, as it opens the door for all Canadians regardless of their personal financial position to receive or have access to health care.

• (1110)

However, another aspect of access is when does one have the access to the actual treatment necessary for the condition one is presenting. I am thinking now in relation to the when part from a clinical or medical point of view. If a person requires a hip replacement, for example, or finds a lump on their body in some area it should not be, to get access to treatment can take sometimes weeks or months. Access to treatment from a medical and clinical aspect is extremely important, sort of the stitch in time premise.

Early intervention in many situations saves future grief and discomfort for the individual as well as saving health care dollars in the long run, as one is addressing or presenting a condition much earlier than one would be by leaving it for months or weeks and so on.

There are other problems with the Canada Health Act. There are restrictive clauses that create these problems. Portability comes to mind as another one.

These problems must be addressed and resolved. The act needs revising and updating, allowing for more flexibility for the provinces not only in the administration and management of the service but also in the actual meaning or interpretation of the five principles. The meaning of decentralization of authority must play a much larger role in our health care system to preserve it.

In the *Financial Post* on April 22 of this year an article was written by Alan Toulin entitled "Decentralization Appeals to Canadians' Desire for Control". Alan Toulin is saying Canadians want more control over the things that directly affect their lives, and governments at all levels are feeling the pressure of this growing public sentiment.

He also quotes a leading business figure from Quebec, André Bérard, the National Bank chairman and chief executive officer.