

Oral Questions

Mr. Pepin: I say we are not there yet. I expect that quantum jump to take place in early 1990s. In the meantime, and this is the important thing, a number of things are being done such as a number of widenings of the Welland Canal in places to permit the passage of two ships, and a number of improvements in the traffic system by the use of electronics. The tariff has been changed also to favour the longer ships. Therefore number of things are being done on a progressive basis to meet with the growing demand on the Welland Canal.

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HEALTH CARE

EXTRA BILLING BY PHYSICIANS

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, my question follows on those that my leader put to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. For the first time the minister has indicated to the House that she has altered the government's position from one of eliminating extra billing to a position where the federal government now appears to think it is going to control extra billing. May I ask the minister what the federal government's position is? Is it to eliminate extra billing, or is it to control extra billing?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Madam Speaker, the hon. member makes a mistake in the first part of his question. The goal of the government as it has always put forward to the public, to the different parties or to the different players, has remained the same. It is the strengthening of medicare by the clarification of the five basic standards or conditions which have been in the act for more than 20 years. That has always been the purpose. Two of these conditions in particular, universality and accessibility, have appeared to be threatened in the last three years by two avenues that no one can ignore, namely, extra billing and user fees. Both of these have been recognized as part of the process of negotiation which started yesterday with a very successful meeting toward controlling it. The purpose is to strengthen medicare.

● (1440)

QUERY RESPECTING GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Madam Speaker, in the process of trying to strengthen medicare will the minister recall her own statement to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs not a month ago when she said, "If you permit additional surcharges in the system for Canadians who cannot afford to protect themselves against it, you are back to pre-medicare days and very rapidly the whole system will collapse."

I ask the minister, and I would appreciate a straight answer, is it the intention of the government to abdicate the long-held position that there should be no extra billing, or is it simply the intention of the government to find some way to control it?

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Of course, Madam Speaker, that is exactly what I have said and will continue to say across Canada. I would like to see extra billing reduced to zero. I have explained often to the official health critic of the NDP, who does not seem to understand how the system works, that the federal minister alone cannot ban extra billing, and that a provincial minister cannot ban extra billing if he or she loses doctors to neighbouring provinces. That is the problem. We addressed it in a very realistic way yesterday, and I am very pleased about that. I still do not see why the member plays with words. The idea is to keep medicare universal, and we will succeed because this is a program which all Canadians love best.

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THE JUDICIARY

CHARACTER REFERENCES WRITTEN BY SOLICITOR GENERAL

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, will the Solicitor General tell us whether, when he wrote the Arrindell and English letters on his stationery in his capacity as Solicitor General, he expected and intended that the content of those letters would never be communicated to a judge?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, the letters indicate quite clearly that I was intending to offer my evidence to the lawyers for them to use as they saw fit, including in court.

APPLICATION OF CABINET GUIDELINES

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, since the Solicitor General has now indicated he wrote the letters with the intention that they be communicated to the court, will he tell us how he finds that action to be consistent with the guideline of the Prime Minister which says:

—no member of the cabinet may communicate with members of the judiciary concerning any matter which they have before them . . . ?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): The Prime Minister answered that yesterday, but I take that guideline to apply to informal, off-the-record contact between members of the government and judges, and not to evidence given formally in open court.

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NATIONAL ENERGY BOARD

EXPORT OF POWER BY ONTARIO HYDRO

Hon. George Hees (Northumberland): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister. Three weeks ago, in answer to a question, he advised me that the decision of the National Energy Board allowing Ontario Hydro to export power to the United States from its Nanticoke plant would be coming before cabinet for consideration. I ask the Prime Minister if