

Income Tax Act

I am told that the cost of certain drugs can be deducted from income tax. Each of us expects to spend a certain amount of money each year on sickness, or in payment of medical bills. We do not expect our health to be so perfect that we will have no further need of doctors. We know, too, that we cannot deduct all our expenses in a lifetime. That is we cannot say that because we have to have food for the body, such expenses must be deducted from income tax. In other words we do not expect to deduct all kinds of expenses for our income tax purposes, so that we would have left only a tax on a small amount set aside for entertainment. We know we have to spend a certain amount on medical expenses, and most people are prepared to do this.

It seems to me, however, that one who suffers from a serious ailment of the kind I have mentioned should not be penalized by not being permitted to deduct his expenses. A person requiring anti-convulsive drugs should not be placed in that position, when at the same time someone who is receiving liver injections or injections of some drugs is allowed to deduct the cost of those drugs.

I know there is a floor on medical expenses because the government must raise money to pay the bills of the country. We cannot operate without money; we cannot operate without taxes. Therefore I suggest that consideration might be given to the broadening of the term "deductible expenses" rather than removal of the floor.

That is all I have to say. I do not want to take up too much time in this debate. I wish only to draw the attention of the house to this matter that was brought to my attention yesterday by my constituents.

Mr. Knowles: Will the hon. member permit a question before he sits down? I would agree with what he suggests should be added to the definition, but has he considered how those people would get deductibility for these other drugs to which he refers if the 3 per cent floor is still there? People using insulin do not get a deduction because of the 3 per cent floor. It would just disappoint more people, unless you removed the floor.

Mr. Murphy (Westmorland): My view is that if you remove the floor altogether you would leave these people of whom I am speaking high and dry. It would be fairer to all concerned to—

Mr. Knowles: To add them.

Mr. Murphy (Westmorland): To add them rather than to change the existing floor.

Mr. E. G. Hansell (MacLeod): Mr. Speaker, I am going to say only a word. I support the resolution offered by the hon. member

for Winnipeg North Centre. I am not going into a technical argument; I am not going to quote a lot of facts and figures. I support the resolution because it is the humanitarian thing to do. We have to look at a thing of this kind in that light. Sickness is a thing nobody wants; sickness is a thing nobody invites; sickness is a thing people fight against. They do not want the thing to happen in their homes and they will do all that is possible to prevent it. Therefore it means that people become the victims of circumstances that impose upon them ill health with the consequent expenses.

It is also true that the majority of our people are in the low income brackets. In these days of high living costs, they find considerable difficulty in getting by, and when sickness comes of course it means an added burden. A good many people in the small income brackets are family people, people with children. Sickness is a thing that comes to children quite often and puts an added burden on the incomes of the parents.

We can say that the homes of our nation are the mainstay of the nation. Without our homes we would not have a nation. Yet the people in the medium and small income brackets who are rearing families and encountering sickness have that additional expense, an expense which they have not purposely incurred. For that reason alone medical expenses should be deductible for income tax purposes.

All groups in this house have advocated a national health insurance scheme. The party in power recognizes that it would cost a tremendous amount of money to put a health insurance scheme into operation. We recognize that it would cost a lot; nevertheless all are agreed that some sort of national health insurance plan should be put into operation. Why do we offer that? We offer it for the same basic reason that we suggest with respect to this resolution. People in the medium and small income brackets cannot afford to pay medical expenses. Therefore the whole nation should share in that cost. That is the general and basic idea of the national health scheme. By the same token, and because of the same principle, why should people not be permitted to deduct the total of their medical expenses before paying their income taxes?

It seems to me that with all the facts and figures in our possession, we do not really have to argue it from that point of view. It may be all right to do so, but the more humanitarian fact appeals to me, namely that since we do not incur the expense purposely it is not in the same category as buying radios and cars, even though they may be necessary.