

Government Orders

There are many good aspects to the Canada Health Act the Reform Party wants to preserve.

However, the government cannot on one hand take money away from the provinces and on the other hand tell them they cannot raise funds. That is not fair. Let us enable them to raise funds. That would perhaps provide for a two-tier system in which there is a private system and a public system.

We must understand the federal government can take the responsibility and say to the provinces that if they have a private health care system only private moneys would be exchanged. Not a penny of taxpayers dollars would go into that private system. It is a fallacy to assume we in this party want to have taxpayers money going into a private system.

It would enable the public system to have decreased waiting lists and it would also provide more money for the public system. Some would choose to use the private system. The bottom line is that people on the public system would receive their essential health care services in a more timely, more expeditious and more efficient fashion.

This is an unequal system but we have an unequal system now. Is it not better to have an unequal system which provides better health care for all Canadians than to have the present system which will worsen as time goes on? The Canadian public, when it understands that, would agree. We in this party would support the government if it would take the initiative and do that. To stick its head in the sand and say nothing is wrong is completely untrue.

The provincial government in British Columbia was forced to implement a stop gap measure of \$18 million just to lower the MRI waiting list and the waiting list for coronary artery bypass grafting. Those lists have 700 or 800 names. If a person is waiting for open heart surgery, I am sure they would find it extremely disconcerting to find out they have to wait five months. Senator Keon mentioned the waiting list for non-emergency heart surgery in Ottawa is now five months. That is a travesty.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Madam Speaker, the great national party and defender of the most vulnerable, the party that used to lean more towards the NDP than towards the Reform Party, the party that was so full of the words pride and dignity is no more. It has caved in to repeated attacks from the wealthy and the financial community who just happen to be friends of the party.

Yesterday's Liberal Party has turned into a kind of progressive conservative reform party. That is what we can call that party now, whose members sit across the way. With this latest

budget, the members opposite, these progressive conservative reform members, have abandoned their basic principles. The vulnerable, the sick, people in substandard housing, the unemployed and the elderly, all these people who need the government's special attention, have been abandoned in the name of deficit reduction.

The message from the government benches sounds hollow. It is also less than forthright, because it would have the public believe that all these vulnerable people and our social programs are to blame for the fact that the federal government is bankrupt. This is a misrepresentation of the facts, and it is unacceptable. By sending this kind of message, members opposite, which I can no longer call Liberals or "Rouges", are questioning the very role of government.

Is this role not supposed to be to help the weakest in our society, to ensure that everyone has a decent standard of living, that our collective wealth is distributed equitably and that those who have a measure of wealth should participate in this collective effort? Is this not the government's mandate?

Unfortunately, members opposite, those former Liberals with their millionaire Minister of Finance, are stupidly caught up in a one-track economic and financial mind set, totally oblivious to social principles and human values. Pretty soon, if we replace the Minister of Finance with a calculator, no one will notice the difference. The government will add and subtract without considering the disastrous impacts of these cuts.

The Minister of Finance of this new progressive conservative reform party represents the exact opposite of Robin Hood. Instead of taking money from the rich to give to the poor, the Minister of Finance takes money from the poor to give to the rich.

Could we expect anything else from a failed Robin Hood who is himself a millionaire and who admitted that he was familiar with the whole range of tax exemptions? He even owns a fleet of ships, some of which fly flags of convenience to avoid Canadian taxes. What a wonderful example of sharing and participating in our collective responsibilities! He prefers to protect his wealthy friends at the expense of those who are less well off.

I am thinking of those notorious family trusts—billions of dollars sheltered from the tax man. In this case, the minister decided to protect his friends for another five years. I think it is shocking to protect The Cadillac crowd and cut benefits to the unemployed.

What about the government's fiscal options? For instance, the banks are taxed a modest \$100 million while the Royal Bank alone, a good federalist, made more than \$1.2 billion worth of profit last year. How do you justify this fiscal decision, when last year, taxes paid by seniors increased by \$500 million?

What about the thousands of businesses that pay no tax, while workers just keep paying more?