

Oral Questions

time. We hope to have it finalized in the not too distant future. This is, again, a recommendation by the Tariff Board that we act in respect of the surcharge so that we can act immediately. Past history indicates that the system we have used is too slow. I agree with the hon. member in this regard. This is something we have to finalize with our trading partners.

Mr. McCain: Mr. Speaker, do we, or do we not, have the opportunity to charge surtax against unreasonably low-priced products brought into Canada in competition with our own food producers and processors? "Yes" or "No"?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, we still have the same system. We are using the system we have always used but, as the hon. member knows—or, I am sure, should be aware—the recommendation was that the new system should be one that would allow us to react much quicker than we could under the old system. By the time we go through the procedures and give them 48 hours' notice, sometimes the damage is done. What they wanted was what the Tariff Board recommended, that we react immediately to that kind of dumping of that kind of product into Canada.

● (1415)

Mr. McCain: Mr. Speaker, one final supplementary. Were we, or were we not, successful in negotiating with our foreign trade partners the right, without expense to other commodities, to impose surtax on imports at unreasonably low prices into this country? "Yes" or "No"?

Mr. Whelan: Mr. Speaker, it seems strange to me, after the hon. member rambles on in his question, that he can expect a short "Yes" or "No" answer from me. The hon. member knows full well, and I know that he knows, the present system which we use with regard to using a surtax. We have not at this time been successful in negotiating a proper system of surtax, but we offer them more protection under the new system than they have ever had in the history of any government in this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

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HEALTH AND WELFARE

FUNDING OF MEDICAL CARE PROGRAM

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Given that the Established Programs Financing Act, which was passed by parliament with the support of the Liberal party and the Conservative party, limited the financial commitment of the federal government to medical care by restricting its contributions to the size of the gross national product, regardless of the increases in health care costs throughout the country, can the President of the Treasury Board tell us whether or not the federal government is now prepared to fund increases in the

medicare program that are required to meet the concerns of the Minister of National Health and Welfare that the universal nature of our health care program is being eroded and that some provinces are not paying their doctors enough?

Hon. Judd Buchanan (President of the Treasury Board): Mr. Speaker, that question does not fall within the bailiwick of the President of the Treasury Board. It should have been directed to my colleague, the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, this has been a long-standing problem. When medicare was introduced, it was understood that after a certain period of time the costs would be shared in a different fashion. When the new arrangement was negotiated, the formula that we proposed at that time was totally acceptable to the provinces and now they have to cope with the responsibility. The hon. member should make sure that the Ontario government maintains the principle of medicare which they agreed to support all along.

Mr. Rae: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Finance. Seeing that the government is a partner in restraint with the provincial governments in this matter of medicare, could the Minister of Finance tell us what the legal authority of the Minister of National Health and Welfare was when she said that she would be cutting off funding under the Established Programs Financing Act?

Mr. Chrétien: Mr. Speaker, it is not the practice in this House to comment on legal opinions; I think the hon. member should know that. When we signed the agreement for the new formula, it was understood that medicare would be maintained in the spirit in which the program was established. Some of the provinces—by the way, most of the provinces which are getting out of medicare in this manner have Conservative governments—are not, in my judgment, respecting the spirit and the letter of the agreement.

An hon. Member: There is only one Liberal government.

GOVERNMENT ACTION TO MAINTAIN MEDICAL CARE PROGRAM

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. In the debate on the Established Programs Financing Act, the then minister of national health and welfare, now the Minister of Justice, said "these universal health insurance programs have become so deeply ingrained in the Canadian fabric that any retrograde step in the form of halting or even reducing these programs is absolutely unthinkable." In that same debate, the Prime Minister said that the elimination of an active federal role in medicare was "a gamble."

Now that the unthinkable has happened and the gamble has been lost at the expense of many Canadians, and this government has tied itself into a program which restricts its ability to administer the medicare program, can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us what he intends to do and what his government intends to do within its powers, granted the fact that it has