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| Saskatchewan | 21e | 4e | Discours sur la santé | 5 juin 1990 | George McLeod | Minister of Health | Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan |

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to introduce on my right, Dr. Bill MacDonald who's the deputy minister of Health; immediately behind Dr. MacDonald is Dr. Roy West, the associate deputy minister of Health; behind myself is Kathy Langlois, the executive director of finance and administration; and behind my colleague, the Associate Minister, behind Mr. Wolfe is Neil Gardner, associate deputy minister of Health. As you will see, we have various other officials of the Health Department here who will be ready to assist with questions that may come on various branches of the department -- as we all know, a very, very large department.

Mr. Chairman, just prior to -- I had a word with the critic just a few moments ago -- prior to or before we get into the specific questioning, I thought that I would try to set into perspective some of the things that we've been trying to do as a mission in this department that these people that are here plus all of the many other -- and I can literally say thousands of people who work in the Department of Health and in the health delivery field across Saskatchewan throughout the year -- the kind of mission that we have and that all the people in that area, in this health area share.

 Our mission in the Department of Health, Mr. Chairman, is working together for health and well-being. It's a mission for health that I know is shared by all of our citizens, and it's a mission that can only be accomplished by continuing to work together as we prepare for the challenges of the '90s and obviously the first time we've considered a budget of this department in this new decade. We have a vision as well, Mr. Chairman, and it's a vision of a healthy population in a healthy society. It's a vision that guides this government in its policy and priority setting, and it's a vision of protection, of consultation, and of prevention.

Our focus on protection has led to the development of a comprehensive health system dedicated to providing the quality health services all of our people need. Through consultation we now have a province where communities, health care providers, and government work together to compassionately and efficiently meet the health needs of our people. And by stressing prevention, we're building a healthier population, better equipped to take responsibility for their health and their well-being. These are the principles we've relied on in the past and they will serve us well as a guide in our future.

In the next 10 years, Mr. Chairman, there will be as much change as we have seen in the last 100 years. And how we together respond to the challenges of the '90s and beyond will determine our common future. Saskatchewan has changed profoundly in the years since our health system was first designed. A health system designed for the '90s and beyond must reflect those changes in order to remain caring, effective, and responsive.

As our population ages, the amount of service we devote to the elderly will continue to grow. Seniors account for about 13 per cent of our population and use roughly half of all health services, and their use per person of some major services has been increasing very, very quickly in recent years. The number of people in our province over 85 years of age is expected to double in the next 20 years, and almost two-thirds of those 85 and older require home care or special \_care home services.

Mr. Chairman, this trend will create unprecedented demands for flexibility and responsiveness in the health system of the future. One of the most fundamental changes this province has seen in the past 30 years is the shift in population from rural Saskatchewan to our cities and our towns. Since the early 1960s, our cities have grown steadily. At the same time, our rural population has fallen from more than 50 per cent of our total population to about one-third, and that trend is continuing, Mr. Chairman.

The forces of change have touched all of us in countless ways. The average family size has decreased significantly and is expected to drop even further. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of single-parent families. And stress and violence in society are taking a higher toll than ever with significant impact on our health system. In addition, Mr. Chairman, the '80s brought with them new developments in technology that made it possible for us to help more people with health problems than we'd ever be able to do before. Advances in anesthesia and ultrasound and neonatal technology, to name just a few, resulted in numerous new services and significant new funding demands.

Technological developments in fields such as genetics, immunology, imaging, and treatment will pose new challenges in the 1990s. We'll have to examine the ethical issues surrounding the use of these technologies and decide how and where they can be used most effectively. The last decade also witnessed a substantial growth in the use of health services all across our province. There were more doctors' visits, more surgeries performed, more prescription drugs used per person than ever before in our history.

Despite all of these changes -- and there are many others that I haven't mentioned -- Saskatchewan's health system has seen only minor structural changes in the past 30 years. The province of Saskatchewan has an excellent health care system -- we should make no mistake about that -- one that we can all justifiably take pride in, and we all do. But we can't be complacent, Mr. Chairman. We must be prepared to change as our society changes. The health system is dynamic, not rigid, and we cannot afford to become entrenched in a single approach to health care. Demands for change must be faced, discussed, and realistically met in a co-operative way.

As we enter the next century, the 21st century that we so often hear about here in this House and all throughout the society, we must constantly be on the look-out for ways to improve our system, to ensure continuing high quality services, to ensure that it remains accessible to all, to ensure that it remains relevant to changing illness and health care patterns, to position it to take fullest advantage of improvements in diagnostic and treatment technologies, and to ensure its continued affordability for future generations. As we prepare for this challenge, we must remember that the quality of our health system in the future will be determined by the quality of our thinking today and that we cannot escape the responsibility for tomorrow by evading it today.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to take a few moments now to discuss something we don't spend enough time talking or thinking about: health. You'll note that I said health and not health care. Good health is the single most important resource an individual or society can possess. It gives us the freedom and the power to achieve personal goals and to build our economy and to shape our future. Poor health on the other hand weakens our human potential and power of self-determination. We sometimes forget that it is better health we're working toward, and better health is only assisted by better health care.

We often make the mistaken assumption that health care determines the health of the population. But in reality, health is much more complex than that, and many factors play a role in determining it. Other factors include our genetic make-up, the diet and life-style of expectant mothers, family housing standards and income levels, education levels and knowledge of sound health practices, and an awareness of accident prevention and safety practices. We can't limit our vision, our talent, or our resources to providing only one necessary requirement for good health: health care.

Our challenge is to determine which factors affecting the health of our population can achieve the greatest results with the resources available. How should we as a society respond to this challenge? That's really the question. How should we respond to this challenge?

Should we spend a larger portion of our provincial budget on health? Or should we increase our spending on housing and education in order to prevent many health problems before they start? It's a difficult balancing act not only between health programs, but between all programs in the global sense of the wider budget that we deal with in this House. And it's a balancing act that governments at all levels -- federal, provincial, here and other provinces and municipal governments -- are all struggling with today.

We don't have unlimited resources; that's obvious to us all. So some difficult choices will have to be made. In the ongoing debate sparked by the commission's report, the recent commission that's reported here in our province, the Murray commission, that debate which has been sparked by the report will help us to make those choices.

Mr. Chairman, as I've said, we all share a vision for Saskatchewan. It's a vision of a healthy society and a healthy population. To reach that goal we will continue to provide and fund health services that contribute to our health, but we must also promote and support those activities that maintain wellness and lead to better health.

As a society we must accept our share of the responsibility to help people to develop and maintain a sense of well-being through promotional and preventive mental health activities. To successfully combat mental illness and disability we must make a greater effort to welcome and empower self-help groups, family members, the community, and employers to take an active role in prevention and treatment and in rehabilitation. We must begin to do more to promote health and well-being and prevent illness. Just as immunization contributes to our physical health, we must develop support services that in effect immunize or protect us from the stresses of day-to-day life.

Our government is prepared to play a leadership role in the promotion of healthy life-styles all across the province, and providing this type of information to people will allow them to become partners in a health care system whose goal is good health.

Yes, Mr. Chairman, all of our citizens share a vision for Saskatchewan. It's a vision of a healthy society and a healthy population. To reach our goal we will continue to provide and fund health care services that contribute to our health, but we must also promote and support those activities that maintain wellness and lead us there.

We know that we have our work cut out for us but our commitment to meet the challenges of the future is as strong as it has ever been. We know the best way to respond to these challenges is through consultation and co-operation. Our government believes in consultation. We're committed to bringing all the players together. We believe consultation is the best way to define needs and efficiently meet them. I hear some of the members on the other side would like to enter this debate. I'll invite them all to enter the debate.

Our government, Mr. Chairman, does not pretend to have all of the answers to this. And I have said that before in public ways and I'll say it here in the House to the hon. member from Moose Jaw who sits and smiles over there, we don't pretend to have all of the answers to these questions. These are important questions for this wide society that we all purport to serve here. So I would just say to the hon. member to allow his critic who is paying some attention to these estimates, to carry on in a few moments.

But it is our responsibility, Mr. Chairman, to summon the participation and the partnership of health care professionals and users to find those answers. We will accomplish our goals by continuing to work together with nursing professions, the physicians, pharmacists, other health professionals who play a major role in our health advisory committees.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased that this year's budget and with the direction that this budget is taking. Despite a difficult fiscal and economic environment, our government has continued to ensure access without financial impediments to hospital, medical, and other health services. And at the same time we've been able to promote healthier living through a variety of community Dprograms. We in Saskatchewan can be proud of our record, Mr. Chairman, but now is not the time to rest on laurels. The key to our continued success is our ability to adapt to changing conditions, and I believe that we can do more than simply adapt our present health system to new realities. I believe strongly that we can strengthen this system that is already a good system. We can and we will meet those challenges that lie ahead and the result will be a stronger and a healthier Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chairman, this budget that we're considering, these estimates, a budget of $1.5 billion, an increase over last year of $135 million, is a good budget and it's a budget that pays attention to the health needs of our citizens, and we're proud of the budget that's presented here today, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.