

FIRST MINISTERS' MEETING

RÉUNION DES PREMIERS MINISTRES

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Ottawa, Ontario

--- Upon resuming on Thursday, September 16, 2004 at 0024

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): If I could call the meeting to order.

What I would like to do now is to ask Mr. Stewart MacKinnon, who is the Secretary of the Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, le Secrétariat des conférences intergouvernementales canadiennes.

Where is Mr. MacKinnon? Mr. MacKinnon will take the signature book.

--- Prime Minister Martin signs the book

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Mr. MacKinnon will take the signature book and each premier can sign.

I might just tell you that Mr. MacKinnon has been the Secretary of the Conference Secretariat since 1983. Now, you think of what he has seen, conferences in this room, and he will be retiring in November of this year.

Now, I have got to say, Mr. MacKinnon, it's -- we are going to be very sad to see you retire, but it is not a bad thing to retire on a high.

--- The Premiers sign the book

TRÈS HON. PAUL MARTIN: Bonsoir. Les premiers ministres se sont entendus sur un plan pour de meilleurs soins de santé pour toutes les Canadiens et tous les Canadiens. C'est une entente sur 10 ans, conçue pour durer 10 ans. Ce plan permettra d'améliorer notre système de santé. Il donne le coup d'envoi à notre projet de réduction des temps d'attente et d'expansion des soins à domicile à travers tout le pays.

Canada's First Ministers have agreed and have just signed on a 10-year plan, a deal for a decade, that will lead to better health care for all Canadians. It is a 10-year agreement that is designed to actually hold for 10 years and it will lay the foundation for critical improvements to the health system that will endure beyond that.

This accord will kick-start a reduction in waiting times right across the country, except for reporters at federal province meetings.

It will improve access to health care professionals so that Canadians can see a doctor when they need to, where they need to. It will result in the expansion of home care services across the country, better pharmaceutical coverage and

management and, above all else, real accountability to Canadians.

Coming in, I knew this meeting would be hard work. Premier McGuinty, the current Chairman among the Premiers, knew it too and all of the Premiers around this table did as well.

During our discussions there was passion and forthrightness and, yes, there were tensions forcefully expressed. The public process to which we committed was increasingly difficult to maintain as our deliberations grew intense and detailed. But in the end there was steadfast political will among the First Ministers. People around this table stood up for health care and for Canadians. There was determination to secure a long-term deal that will stop the annual ritual of federal-provincial disputes and start the process of renewal and positive change in health care.

Au cours de nos discussions, il est devenu évident que, pour réaliser une véritable réforme pour renforcer notre système de santé, un système de qualité universelle et accessible, nous ne pouvions pas mettre l'emphase uniquement sur l'argent. Il est essentiel de savoir ce que nous obtenons pour notre argent.

As part of the agreement Canada's Premiers have agreed to provide meaningful information to Canadians on the progress they are making to reduce waiting times. That means robust and comparable indicators. It means evidence-based benchmarks for maximum acceptable waiting times in priority areas. And it means multi-year targets set by each province or territory and reported then nationally, publicly to Canadians.

To help the provinces and territories produce measurable results, further implement reforms and ensure long-term predictable support for core services, the federal government will increase by some \$41 billion its contribution to health care in Canada over the next decade, beginning in the current fiscal year. This represents the full realization not only of the financial recommendations of the Romanow Commission, which in fact we have exceeded, but also the comprehensive plan for health care that was outlined in our election platform.

I want to share with Canadians some of the highlights of the enhanced federal contribution to health care in Canada.

First, we will invest an additional \$500 million a year in base health funding over and above the \$2 billion required to fill the Romanow gap to ensure further expansion of home care and catastrophic drug coverage.

Second, we have agreed to one-time investment of \$500 million in medical equipment to finance important purchases that in themselves will help to reduce waiting times for key procedures.

Troisièmement, nous avons été convaincus par les premiers ministres ici présents et par les interventions des spécialistes et des professionnels de la santé qu'il est difficile d'embaucher des médecins, des infirmières, des infirmiers et d'autres professionnels de la santé quand on ne peut compter que sur du financement à court terme. Nous allons donc continuer à investir dans le fonds de réduction des temps d'attente au-delà des six années prévues. Nous allons investir un milliard de dollars additionnel pendant les quatre dernières années de cette entente pour appuyer l'embauche de professionnels de la santé. Cela constitue une composante intégrale de toute stratégie visant à assurer l'accessibilité à des soins en temps opportun.

Fourth, for the first time the federal government is committing to an escalator, a 6 per cent annual increase in the federal health care contribution. This escalator is of core importance to the health reform efforts of the provinces and territories. It will allow governments to plan far ahead, to build with confidence, to invest with the certainty that the federal contribution to health is guaranteed and is growing.

Nous nous sommes aussi entendus sur la nécessité d'améliorer la prévisibilité de la péréquation et de la formule de financement des territoires. Nous discuterons de ces questions importantes et d'autres questions financières lors d'une prochaine rencontre des premiers ministres le 26 octobre prochain.

This week Canada's First Ministers came to Ottawa to this meeting on health care with ambitious goals. They did so for good reason. We have, as a nation, adopted the best aspects of the competitive market economy, and at the same time we have invested in and built the system that allows each and every Canadian, regardless of status, regardless of income, access to high-quality, publicly-funded health care throughout their lives. We are in an unique position among industrial countries.

The Canadian government has legitimate budget surpluses and within fiscal reason the opportunity to secure our social safety net, not only for ourselves but for our children and our grandchildren after them.

Forty to 50 years ago visionary hard-working leaders embraced the ideal of communal caring and gave us the universal health insurance that we strive today to preserve and to enhance.

I want all of us around this table, all of us in this room and I know all of us watching on television, we all want Canada to lead the way, to take a valued social program like medicare and make it work for the next generation, to make it strong and sustainable. We can do this. We have the desire, individually, collectively. We have the means and now we have the agreement.

French - 9:38

We, Canada's 14 First Ministers, have tonight signed our names to this 10-year agreement for better health care. Canadians will hold us accountable now, tomorrow and in the decade to come. This is as it should be.

I would now call on the Premiers and the territorial leaders, beginning with Premier McGuinty of Ontario.

HON. DALTON MCGUINTY (Ont.): Thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister.

It has been my privilege to serve as Chair of the Council of the Federation during its this First Ministers' meeting. I am pleased, in that capacity, to announce that we do have good news, good news for Canadians and good news for their health care. We have agreed on a plan.

Il s'agit d'un bon plan, un bon plan qui appuie nos efforts visant à réduire les temps d'attente. Il s'agit d'un bon plan pour les patients et les patientes à qui nous offrons maintenant le service, et pour ceux et celles dont nous prendrons soin au cours des années à venir.

It is a good plan to support our efforts to reduce wait times. It is a good plan for the patients we serve now and the patients we will have to care for in the years ahead.

I want to thank the Prime Minister for his leadership. Without his commitment and determination we would not have come to an agreement.

I want to commend my fellow Premiers for the way they have worked together. Regional differences were put aside, political stripes became invisible. It hasn't always been an easy or a tidy process, but in the end it is a reminder that far more unites us as Canadians than divides us as governments.

What has been paramount throughout this process right around the table is a commitment to 30 million Canadians and their health and well-being.

I want to take the opportunity as well to thank officials from each and every one of our delegations. We are all blessed to have working with us highly principled and professional public servants who work quietly, consistently and constantly on behalf of Canadians.

When a conference began I talked about Canadians' ability to build this country with equal parts realism and optimism. I urged us to be clear-eyed about the challenges facing our health care system, while having the vision to tackle them. This plan, and the fact we were able to forge it together, makes me more optimistic than ever about our shared future.

But I would urge us all to continue to be realistic as well. There are still enormous challenges ahead. Today we have made progress. How much progress, though, depends on all of us, and how we translate this plan into action.

I want to take this opportunity as well to thank our partners in health care, the hard-working administrators, doctors and nurses and other professionals who deliver front-line care. I say to them: We value your contribution and we ask for your help in reducing waiting times.

I know in my own province of Ontario the outlook is brighter today. Yet, at the same time, we work to deliver the results our people deserve we still face a large deficit. There are still tough choices to be made for all of us. But we can do more to reduce wait times with this plan than we could have without it.

I also started these proceedings on Monday by saying that as Canadians we want quality health care for our parents and grandparents when they need it, for our own generation as we need it, and for our children and their children should they need it. This plan supports our efforts to deliver that care.

I want to conclude my comments by speaking to the people that matter most in all of this, the people of Canada, especially those who are waiting for care, perhaps for cardiac or cancer care, for cataract surgery, maybe a hip or knee replacement, or a an MRI or CT scan. I want you to know that while we cannot entirely eliminate all wait times, and we do face growing demands in the years ahead, we are all working on your behalf to make things better.

We know that ultimately we are accountable to you and your families and it is our responsibility to you that inspires our efforts, that informs this plan and that will guide its implementation.

If the plan we have reached today is merely an agreement between First Ministers, then all we have done is made headlines. If we continue to work together, if we commit ourselves to real reform and real action, then we will have made a real difference and that is exactly what Canadians need, want and deserve.

Thank you.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you, Premier.

Maintenant, je demanderais le Premier Ministre du Québec, monsieur Charest.

L'HON. JEAN CHAREST (QC): Merci, Monsieur le Premier Ministre du Canada, Monsieur le Président du Conseil de la Fédération et chers collègues premiers ministres, Monsieur le Ministre Mar.

Mesdames et messieurs, la délégation québécoise est venue ici forte de l'appui de la population du Québec et en particulier de tous les intervenants québécois du monde de la santé que j'avais rencontrés dans les jours précédent la tenue de cette conférence.

Je tiens à saluer d'emblée les hommes et les femmes qui travaillent dans le réseau de la santé et des services sociaux du Québec, qu'ils soient infirmiers, infirmières, médecins, administrateurs, travailleurs de soutien. Ce sont des hommes et des femmes qui sont sur la première ligne et sur qui nous comptons afin que nous puissions aider ceux et celles qui ont droit à nos services à un moment très important dans leur vie.

Le Gouvernement du Québec s'est présenté à cette conférence pour travailler de façon constructive à l'amélioration de la prestation des soins de santé. On l'a fait avec les intérêts supérieurs du Québec en tête et on l'a fait, Monsieur le Premier Ministre, avec une vision moderne du fédéralisme canadien qui reconnaît et valorise nos différences.

Nos travaux ont mis en lumière certaines réalités. D'abord, nous avons des défis qui sont des défis très importants sur l'accessibilité, sur la qualité des soins, santé aussi, c'est un phénomène de vieillissement de la population.

Un défi qui a mis en relief le fait que les gouvernements provinciaux et territoriaux sont d'abord des premiers

gouvernements compétents pour livrer les services de soins de santé.

Il y a aussi un défi de financement, nous le savons, un problème de sous-financement où le Gouvernement fédéral était interpellé.

Le Gouvernement du Québec a fait de la santé sa première priorité. Nous avons réinvesti, depuis notre élection, 2,2 milliards de dollars dans notre réseau de la santé dont le budget est passé de 17,9 milliards de dollars à 20,1 milliards de dollars. C'est 43 pour cent de nos dépenses de programme qui, à ce jour, vont au réseau de la santé et des services sociaux.

C'est sur la base de ces constats que nous avons pu conclure une entente dont tous les Québécois peuvent se réjouir. Une entente porteuse d'une nouvelle ère dans le fonctionnement de la Fédération canadienne.

L'entente conclue entérine des progrès importants, aussi bien en ce qui concerne le financement de la santé, l'amorce de la résolution du déséquilibre fiscal qu'en ce qui concerne l'acceptation d'un fédéralisme qui est respectueux de nos différences.

Il y a lieu, en effet, de souligner l'ouverture manifestée par l'ensemble de mes collègues depuis la création de ce Conseil de Fédération en juillet 2003; depuis cette réunion de Niagara qu'a présidé notre collègue le Premier Ministre de l'Ontario au mois de juillet 2004; depuis la réunion de Toronto où à chaque occasion nous avons manifesté notre nouvelle ouverture sur ce fédéralisme et notre volonté commune de reconnaître les différences et de créer une nouvelle ère.

Je veux, Monsieur le Premier Ministre, vous remercier personnellement. Vous avez fait un pari audacieux; celui de tenir cette conférence fédérale/provinciale dans cette salle où, avouons-le, pas toutes les conférences ont réussi.

Je suis dans les pas de d'autres Premiers Ministres du Québec qui ont fréquenté cette salle: René Lévesque, Robert Bourassa.

L'histoire retiendra que nous avons vécu ici dans cette salle de très grands moments de décision et pour le Québec, et pour le Canada. Vous avez osé l'ouvrir à nouveau pour que nous puissions ensemble commencer le grand débat sur l'avenir de nos services de soins de santé. et aussi pour nous permettre d'articuler une nouvelle vision de ce que peut être le Canada.

Tous ces signes présagent d'un renouveau dans la relation du Québec avec ses partenaires fédératifs qui sera bénéfique pour le fonctionnement de notre fédération pour l'avenir du fédéralisme et pour tous les citoyens du Canada.

Pour le financement de la santé, nous avons fait des progrès très importants. Le niveau de financement augmentera de façon sensible, quoique les besoins vont demeurer extrêmement importants également.

Je veux rappeler également certaines réalités. Vous l'avez dit dans vos remarques, le gouvernement fédéral continue d'avoir des surplus et la question du déséquilibre fiscal continue d'être à l'avant-plan de nos débats.

En ce sens je me réjouis, Monsieur le Premier ministre, que vous ayez accepté de faire un deuxième pari avec une deuxième réunion qui aura lieu le 26 octobre prochain, et ne voulant pas trop tenter votre chance, ce qui n'aura pas lieu dans cette salle, mais sur un enjeu qui touche de très près l'ensemble de la population du Québec et du Canada, celui du déséquilibre fiscal.

Cette deuxième rencontre, ce sera l'occasion pour nous, bien sûr, de débattre de cette vision que nous avons du partage de nos ressources et des moyens nécessaires pour pouvoir livrer les services dont nous sommes directement responsables, incluant le programme de coopération.

Monsieur le Premier Ministre, chers collègues, nous marquons aujourd'hui une étape très importante dans l'histoire du Canada. Nous avons tracé une voie nouvelle dans le fédéralisme canadien grâce à la reconnaissance de la symétrie par l'ensemble des partenaires de la Fédération.

Nous avons jeté les premiers jalons de la résolution du déséquilibre fiscal et nous avons, nous, osé poser un geste que nul autre avant nous avait osé poser, reconnaître cette différence qui nous est si chère et qui nous définit, nous Québécois, mais qui surtout définit l'ensemble du Canada.

Je vous remercie au nom de la population du Québec. Je veux remercier ma délégation, les Ministres qui m'ont accompagnés, qui sont avec moi aujourd'hui, le ministre des Finances monsieur Séguin, le ministre de la santé monsieur Couillard, le président de mon cocus monsieur Vallières. Et surtout, mon ministre des relations intergouvernementales monsieur Benoît Pelletier.

Je tiens à vous dire, au nom de la population du Québec, que nous marquerons sur notre calendrier pour toujours cette journée du 15 septembre 2004 comme étant une journée importante dans l'histoire de notre peuple. Merci.

TRÈS HON. PAUL MARTIN (CPM Canada): Merci, Monsieur le Premier Ministre.

I now would like to call on Premier John Hamm of Nova Scotia.

HON. JOHN HAMM (NS): Thank you.

Prime Minister and colleagues, by working together we have formed a better partnership to improve health care in Nova Scotia.

Not every expectation will be met. We still need to make choices, but health care for Nova Scotians will be strengthened.

Last week my Minister of Health Promotion and I sat down with our province's partners in delivering better health care. To the 150 or so doctors, nurses and other health care professionals, to the many people who are working hard to ensure that Nova Scotians become healthier, thank you for supporting our efforts to have more invested in health care.

We would not be in a position tonight to talk about a new federal-provincial-territorial partnership without the firm foundation of a strong partnership at home with our health care workers on the frontlines and at the bed sides.

Some of those health care professionals came to Ottawa to be part of the conference.

Our new investments will be consistent with our multi-year plan for better health care. We call it "Your Health Matters". It will help us meet our goals of lower wait times, provide more doctors, nurses and other health professionals. It will assist in expanding care for seniors and helping Nova Scotians lead healthier lives.

As we always have been, Nova Scotia will be accountable for every penny we spend in health care, accountable to our health care partners, accountable to patients and their families and accountable to taxpayers.

Prime Minister, I congratulate you for your stamina.

The dialogue over the past three days was a demonstration of a new way. From a Nova Scotia perspective this was the most successful First Ministers meeting I have attended in more than five years as Premier. I look forward to building on this new

partnership for better health care so we can achieve other positive results for the people of Nova Scotia.

In thanking my colleagues around the table, I also want to thank my Minister of Health, Angus McIsaac, and my staff members who played such an important part in our contribution to this very successful meeting. Thank you.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you very much Premier Hamm.

Premier Lord of New Brunswick.

HON. BERNARD LORD (NB): Thank you very much Prime Minister.

I came here a few days ago to represent the people of New Brunswick with one overriding objective, to conclude a new partnership that would place our health care system on a better footing, et je suis convaincu que nous avons réussi. Nous avons établi un plan qui améliorera la qualité et l'accès des soins de santé pour les patients et leur famille pour les dix prochaines années.

For New Brunswick and New Brunswickers this plan and the funding that goes along with it will support our own health plan, healthy futures, and it will assist in our new investments to sustain and improve services.

In this meeting we shared information on how each and everyone of us are working to improve health care in key areas.

Nous avons parlé de la réduction des temps d'attente, d'améliorer les soins à domicile, de fournir une meilleure assurance-médicaments pour les familles, d'ajouter des ressources humaines dans notre système et de faire la promotion du mieux-être pour nos enfants.

But we all know, and I think we have to be upfront about this, there are still many challenges ahead, and there will still be difficult choices to make. Nevertheless I am convinced that we will succeed and we will continue to change and we will complete the renewal of our health care system. The results will be better health care for families, for our parents and our children.

Et c'est avec enthousiasme et énergie que je vais retourner chez nous au Nouveau-Brunswick pour poursuivre notre travail dans notre système de soins de santé.

Je tiens aussi à souligner l'importance historique de ce que nous avons accompli avec la reconnaissance du fédéralisme asymétrique et ce que ça représente pour l'ensemble du pays et

non seulement pour le Québec, et je crois que nous devons reconnaître que c'est un pas important, oui, pour nos amis québécois, mais pour l'ensemble des Canadiens et des Canadiennes, et c'est avec plaisir pour moi de faire partie de cet exercice, et je vous félicite, Monsieur Martin, pour ces paiements.

It will also be with great pleasure that we will meet again on October 26, and I thank you for that commitment, Prime Minister, and I thank you for your commitment with regards to equalization and the details that we will work out between now and October 26.

It will be mean a great deal to ensure that all Canadians, no matter where they live in this great country, will have access to better services and comparable services.

Enfin, je tiens à vous remercier, Monsieur le Premier ministre, et remercier tous mes collègues, ainsi que tous ceux et celles qui nous ont appuyés dans nos délibérations.

It is clear to me that the success we have achieved today will benefit all Canadians in all regions of Canada and we will enjoy better health care.

Thank you.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you very much, Premier Lord.

I too look forward to the meeting on the 26th and I too look forward to the meeting on equalization. I am not sure that the rest of the meeting will be the unalloyed joy for me that it may well be for you and the others.

I would like to call on Premier Doer of Manitoba.

HON. GARY DOER (MB): Thank you very much, Prime Minister, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

I really believe this morning the plan that we have signed and the agreement that we have put our names to represents new hope for health care for a generation and new hope for Canada with the signatures that are here today.

I believe that we have demonstrated with hard work and passion and good debate and feisty debate that we have the capacities and ability to forge a partnership and a plan that works for Canadians.

I believe the agreement we have for Aboriginal people, in partnership with Aboriginal people, the beginnings of a pharmaceutical plan, the immunization extension rather than short-term funding, home care a the strategy on waiting lists,

amongst other things, will represent a real, real benefit to a health care system that is under stress and will require a lot of work to be able to achieve real and tangible results.

I believe having an escalator in an agreement is very, very important for medicare. We must have an agreement and we do have an agreement with an escalator and that will allow for a lot more predictable decision-making in the hiring of nurses, the training of doctors, the skills of our diagnostic staff and, therefore, that will translate with a great dedicated staff, that we all have, who are under tremendous pressure across this country, it will translate into much better patient care.

I also believe that in this room -- I was here as a member of a legislature in a minority government a few years ago, and it wasn't a very successful experience. The Premier of Quebec was there in a different capacity. I am really delighted that we could come into this room with every province and the federal government represented feeling proud of the work we did, realistic about the heavy lifting that comes after and be able to shake hands and move forward, rather than going backwards.

I believe that this shows the Council of the Federation and the leadership that we have worked on in the Council of the Federation, working with the federal government, can provide real differences for Canadians. We have a meeting in October and we have also work to do on a skilled economy, a training economy, a new economy, internal trade. There are so many other items. I don't want to have you put them on your list. But we have so much work to do when we work together.

I remember at the Grey Cup, less than a year ago, I said to you and the public that I hoped we could move from an era of "take it or leave it" federalism to "give and take" federalism, cooperative federalism.

Prime Minister, I want to congratulate you on allowing us to have a give and take to get a better plan for Canadians and a better health care system for the future.

Thank you and congratulations.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you very much, Premier, very, very much.

I turn now to Premier Campbell of British Columbia.

HON. GORDON CAMPBELL (BC): Thank you, Prime Minister.

Canadians have been waiting a long, long time, Prime Minister, for us to solve the chronic problem of underfunding of our health care system.

Tonight, the longest waiting list of them all has come to an end. Finally, we are opening the door to a sustainable health care system for Canada.

It has been a long journey. In August of 2001, premiers gathered in Victoria, British Columbia and said it was time for us to focus our attention, our energies, on coming up with a sustainable plan for health care because that's what Canadians in each of our provinces expected of us.

And I can tell you, Prime Minister, I am very pleased with the funding that we have found over the last three days. I echo Premier Doer's comments. It is great to be part of a new era of constructive federalism, where there is give and take, and I particularly appreciated the give part of that federalism.

--- Laughter / Rires

HON. GORDON CAMPBELL (BC): I am sorry to see that Mr. Goodale is now looking for the door.

Prime Minister, this required hard work, but I think that we did a number of things this week that go beyond funding. We said to everyone in Canada that we are no longer satisfied with Aboriginal people having a lower standard of health than the rest of Canadians. I want to thank the Aboriginal leadership for coming here and showing us the way ahead.

We said that we wanted every Canadian to have the opportunity to have a full pharmaceutical plan available to them and we are going to start taking the first steps in providing that.

Each of us in this room wants to be sure that every young Canadian child has the immunization program available to them that they need to protect them for their future and to prevent illness.

We talk about, and we are actually acting on, the concerns that have been echoed and explained by territorial leaders now for some time. I am so pleased that we have shown that Canada is big enough to accept all of the differences in all of the regions of this country, as we move ahead.

Prime Minister, last night we watched as Team Canada won -- we didn't watch we heard Team Canada won. I think we should remember this, Prime Minister: in Canada, when we work together, when we focus on common objectives, there is nothing that we can't accomplish.

Let me say this: each of us knows that we have a delegation behind us, a group of people behind us, literally

thousands of people in our provinces, that are working to make our health care system better every single day. Perhaps we, today, have given them a new ray of hope -- our nurses, our doctors, our physiotherapists.

In many ways, Prime Minister, that is because you decided that had you were going to take this challenge on. I say to you tonight that it is no easy challenge. The job is not done, but the job has been begun. I want to say, Prime Minister, your leadership has held helped a great deal in that. I appreciate that. I appreciate the work of my colleagues in the Council of the Federation. Most importantly, I appreciate all of the care givers in Canada's health care system who even now, at this late time, are caring for people that need their help.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you very, very much, Premier.

I would now call on Premier Binns of P.E.I.

HON. PATRICK G. BINNS (PE): Thank you very much, Prime Minister, colleagues and Canadians.

I will perhaps pick up on where Gordon Campbell left off and put it a little different way. Last night Canada won the World Cup of hockey; I think tonight we have signed a world-class agreements on health care. What a great country when this can happen.

For eight years, Prime Minister, since I became premier, I have promoted, to the surprise of no one, the strengthening of the equalization program in the belief that funding levels were not meeting constitutional obligations and because our health care services depend on equalization funding.

In the years ahead, I hope that my province will not require equalization and we are working hard to achieve that objective. But for now it does and, Prime Minister, I think the very existence of such a program speaks to what is important about Canada, that the wealth of the country is shared among those who need it.

In 2000, by working together, First Ministers were successful in removing the cap on equalization. Today, I believe we have reached a much more significant agreement by topping up the funding level of the equalization program beginning this fiscal year.

This restoration is significant and I know when the Is are dotted and the Ts are crossed we will have added about \$1.425 billion in this fiscal year for equalization-receiving provinces

on an entitlement basis. This will be further enhanced next budget year when funding will be increased to \$10.9 billion.

I want to thank my colleagues, and I especially want to thank you, Prime Minister, for recognizing this shortfall and for committing to the October 26th meeting to chart an implementation plan for the future.

I want to thank my staff and I want to thank health care workers and all islanders who helped me prepare to come here and strike a deal.

I believe, Prime Minister, that Prince Edward Islanders can sleep a little better tonight knowing there is a renewed commitment by First Ministers to improve our health care system.

Thank you very much, sir.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you very much, Premier.

Premier Calvert of Saskatchewan.

HON. LORNE CALVERT (SK): Thank you, Prime Minister.

Prime Minister, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, Canadians, on behalf of Minister John Nilson, our Minister of Health in Saskatchewan, who was been here all week, myself and our entire Saskatchewan team, Prime Minister, I first of all want to thank you for your own vision, your own determination, in bringing us together in this forum and in this fashion and to thank you for your patience over these challenging days.

When we came to the conference, as you said, Prime Minister, we all came with goals. If there were a goal to be identified from Saskatchewan's position as the fundamental goal, we came hoping to achieve a goal that we would put medicare in Canada on a more firm foundation for the future.

I believe that, tonight, with the plan that we have signed, publicly funded health care in Canada, not-for-profit health care, is on a more firm foundation than it was when we began our discussions on Sunday night.

I say that because we have achieved, not perfection, but we have achieved more stability in the funding of health care, more predictability, a more adequate level of funding. We have achieved that.

But even more, we have achieved, I believe, in this conference a renewed commitment to change and reform and innovation using those new dollars to tackle some of the difficult issues and waiting lists but, equally, to move to the reform and the change and the innovation that we know must occur

to sustain our system into the future, things like primary health care, pharmacare.

In our agreement we have committed to do that. And in that combination of stable and adequate predictable funding and that commitment to reform and change, I believe medicare tonight, in Canada, is on a more solid foundation.

I want to join with the Premier of Prince Edward Island in thanking you for your determination to build equity in our country. I rejoice in the agreement that we have met around your financial commitment to equalization and look forward to working with you and all premiers, in October, further on that file.

We began, Mr. Prime Minister, you will remember and colleagues will remember, we began this conference with a prayer from two of our Aboriginal leaders in Canada. That blessing may well have served us throughout the course of these days.

Mr. Prime Minister, I want to say I think if there is an historic component to this conference that we should recognize tonight, it is that involvement of our Aboriginal leaders and the partnership that I believe that we have strengthened through this conference and the change that we can make by working together in the health care of Aboriginal people across Canada.

Finally -- finally -- let me invite you, Prime Minister, and all colleagues, if it is possible, that you may join us in Saskatchewan for our October 26th meeting. I guarantee, Prime Minister, in spite of premiers, you will have a good time.

--- Laughter / Rires

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Don't make promises you can't keep!

Thank you very much, Premier Calvert.

I call on Minister Mar, from Alberta.

HON. GARY MAR (AB): Thank you, Prime Minister.

Prime Minister, Premiers and Canadians, I have been in constant with Premier Klein during the course of the last two-and-a-half days for me, and I can advise you that, like other First Ministers, the Premier advises me that he will be signing this agreement.

As Health Minister, representing Premier Klein and all Albertans, it has been a privilege for me to share in this time of helping lay a foundation for better health care for Albertans and for all Canadians.

To the Prime Minister, I say, thank you, Prime Minister, for patience that you have shown and your listening. I did ask you early on to listen carefully to the Premiers of Canada, whose body of knowledge and experience and wisdom in the area of health care has astonished me.

To Canadians, I want to say that I have had a very, very special opportunity -- I must say I feel like a bit of a tourist at this table -- but I wish every Canadian had the opportunity to see their respective premiers and how they serve Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Mr. Prime Minister, regardless of political stripe, I can say that you, Prime Minister Martin, Premier Charest, a Liberal, Premier Lord, a Conservative, Premier Doer, a New Democrat, regardless of political stripe, Prime Minister, all of this individuals -- and Canadians should know -- serve Canadians well. They serve the people that elect them well and they speak on the subjects of health care with passion and with knowledge and with great sincerity.

Prime Minister, the additional federal commitment is a good start to improving the quality and access of health care in Alberta and across the country and you have our commitment that we will do good work with the money that you have provided us.

But there is still more work to be done. Premier Klein has often said that money is only a small part of the solution. Alberta will continue to look for innovations and will continue to strive to provide the best access and quality of health services to Canadians and to report to them. Alberta will work with our health professionals, our health care providers and with governments of provinces and territories across this country to build better health care and wellness care for Albertans and all Canadians.

I want to say thank you to all of the support staff who serve Premier Klein who have served me during my time here. There are many of them to name, but in particular there are three Deputy Ministers who have served the province and their Premier and their respective Ministers very well: Julie Newicky, Jerry Bordeaux and Dr. Roger Palmer. I will wish to thank all of them, and again to say congratulations to you, Prime Minister, and thanking you very much.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you, Minister.

I would now like to call on Premier Williams of Newfoundland and Labrador.

HON. DANNY WILLIAMS (NL): Thank you, Prime Minister.

Prime Minister and colleagues, my fellow Canadians, I first of all want to say how pleased I am to have had the honour to participate in these historic proceedings. I also want to say how proud I am to have been part of the team around this table, the competent and very dedicated and hard-working people in this room; and as well the people that sit behind the people around this table, my own staff, my officials, my ministers. I have had a chance to see you all in action. A lot of the work is done in the back lines not only on the front lines and I think we have all served Canadians well and I thank you collectively. I include the people behind you, Prime Minister, your ministers and your assistants. Thank you.

It has been a long process. It has been a tough process. The meals have been sparse, the sleep has been sparse, but I think we have accomplished something worthwhile for Canadians over the last three days.

I made the comment when I think one of the media indicated that this was just really petty bickering among leaders. Well, we know it wasn't just petty bickering. This was a tough negotiation. But the stakes were very high. The stakes were important. They are important to all Canadians and individually they are important to our provinces, important to you, Prime Minister, as the leader of our great country. I think we handled ourselves well. We fleshed out the issues and I am proud of what we have accomplished. I particularly enjoyed the debates yesterday afternoon all during the day when we really touched on the issues, when we talked about wait times and we talked about pharmacare and we talked about home care and we talked about accountability. I think we collectively have accomplished the goals that you set out to do when we came here.

We also talked about issues that are important to northern regions, transportation and funding. We talked about our Aboriginal Peoples and we met with our Aboriginal Peoples and I was proud to be part of that ceremony.

When I first had an opportunity to speak in this room, I talked about the impact that the plight of Aboriginal children had on me when I made a trip to the north. I talked about Tommy, a young boy in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, a 10 year old who had to leave his home and family and his community to fight cancer on his own. I talked about the dedicated health care professionals, the nurses and the doctors in remote regions

who provide a great service to our country. I also talked about the indebtedness that I have personally for the health care system for what it has done for me, for my family, and for my grandson.

That is really what it is all about. That is why we are here. We are here to try to improve the services for the people who need it. We are also here to provide a payback to the people who provide these services and also the people who receive these services. We have to be concerned about the providers and concerned about the recipients, the patients.

I just want to be able to go back to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and say that I did my best to try to help out a system that is suffering in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Prime Minister, I indicated to you that we have a serious fiscal problem in our province, but I don't expect you -- that is not just your problem, that is my problem, it is our problem and I don't expect you to fix and heal all those problems. But every single dollar in our province is very, very precious because we have so little. Well, I can sleep tonight soundly knowing that we did everything we could here. I think as a group of people we didn't leave a dollar on the table and you gave everything you had and that is a good deal. That is a good result.

I said we would all have to hold our noses and we all have to hold our nose because nobody gets everything they want. No deals come easy and I think we have served everybody well.

I don't want to raise expectations to Newfoundland and Labrador. We have got a great 10-year plan to strengthen health care and I'm proud of it. It is a great start. But we still have a way to go from a financial perspective in my province. I don't want people at home thinking that this is the mecca. It is: We are there. We have a lot to do, a lot of hard work to do and we do need some more funding. But what you have done has been a superb start. I am so proud to be part of this group on this historic occasion.

I want to thank Premier McGuinty for his leadership, as head of the federation. Tough spot to be in, to have to go in to have the interface to try to represent our interests, to have to deal with our negotiating position and the position on the other side. I don't envy your position, sir, but you did a wonderful job on our behalf.

Personally, Prime Minister, I want to thank you. You have had my respect. You certainly earned even more respect. You are a tough negotiator, sir, and I respect you for that, but you are prepared to compromise and you did. I thank you for your patience, it required a lot, there is no doubt about it. I thank you for your commitment to health care, for Canadians. And I thank you, finally, for your willingness to achieve an agreement for Canadians from St. John's to Vancouver.

Congratulations on a job well done.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you very much, Premier.

Premier Handley of the Northwest Territories.

HON. JOSEPH L. HANDLEY (NT): Thank you, Prime Minister.

The plan we signed tonight is good for the North and for all of Canada.

I am particularly proud and pleased to have been able to contribute to fashioning this plan to strengthen health care in Canada for a generation and I want to recognize all the people who provided me with advice and support throughout this, our health care professionals, people who brought their health concerns to my attention, the people who provided advice as we prepared, and particularly to my delegation here over the last few days.

I am particularly pleased that the agreement includes a territorial health access fund, \$150 million for five years. Prime Minister, I can assure you that we will show that this is a good investment. In fact, you will be appealing to us to sign another five-year agreement when this one runs out.

The plan we signed today demonstrates the efforts of you, Prime Minister, and all of the Premiers to ensure that all Canadians in all regions are taken into account as we prepare these plans and strategies. Like other jurisdictions in Canada we have been working on reform initiatives for the past years, home care, mental health, addictions, integrated service delivery for primary health care, information systems, tele-health will all benefit from the agreement we signed tonight.

I want to also say that I am very pleased with the leadership that the Aboriginal Chiefs and Presidents have shown in our meeting on Monday that resulted in an Aboriginal health agreement. This \$700 million Aboriginal health fund is aimed at our Aboriginal citizens who represent 50 per cent of our people in the Northwest Territories.

When I arrived here I said I was determined to ensure that the people of the Northwest Territories had access to the quality care they need when they need it and the tools and resources to exercise their individual responsibilities. I believe the agreement we have signed is an important step in helping us to achieve those goals.

I would like to thank you, Prime Minister, for listening and addressing the serious challenges and recognizing the tremendous opportunities and potential that our part of Canada represents.

I would also like to thank Premier McGuinty and all of the Premiers for their steadfast support for the North over the last few days as we negotiated this agreement.

Like I say, Prime Minister, I am pleased with the agreement and I can ensure you that we are going to make work and we are going to show you that we can do this right.

Thank you.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you, Premier.

Premier Fentie of the Yukon.

HON. DENNIS FENTIE (YT): Thank you, Prime Minister. Let me begin by saying that if you want to continue to work late into the night at 24 Sussex Drive you might want to invest in some air conditioning. The heat almost got us.

But, Prime Minister, it has been a great honour for me to have represented Yukoners here at what has been a very significant First Ministers' conference.

I came here to ensure that the needs of our citizens when it comes to health care were addressed and we have accomplished that. With the establishment of a territorial health access fund we can do great things in delivering health care for Yukon citizens.

I came here to address Aboriginal health care and we have taken a significant step forward in that regard.

The number one priority for Yukon at this conference was to address our needs resource-wise to ensure that we can deliver programs and services to our citizens on a level par with all Canadians.

I thank you for your solid commitment to address that issue by providing, starting this year, those necessary resources.

Prime Minister, you committed some months ago to a new era of cooperation between the federal government and the provinces

and territories and what we have accomplished here today is testimony to that commitment and you are to be commended.

I would also like to extend to my colleagues once again that it has been a great pleasure to have worked with you. We have always managed to find consensus when we needed to and I think that has contributed a great deal to what we have done here today.

Premier McGuinty, I know you had a difficult task chairing we, the Premiers, but you have done a commendable job in that regard. So to you, on behalf of the Yukon, we extend to you our greatest appreciation.

I also want to thank my staff and my Yukon team for their efforts and now we must all go to work to deliver on our achievement on behalf of Yukoners and indeed on behalf of Canadians.

Thank you, Prime Minister.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you, Premier Fentie. I can tell you that it was our intention to install air conditioning at 24 Sussex and we had the money up until today. It's gone.

-- Laughter / Rires

Premier Okalik.

HON. PAUL OKALIK (NU): (Native language spoken). Good morning, Prime Minister. Perhaps you can move your office and your home to Nunavut. It will be a little cooler. You won't need air conditioning in the North.

My colleagues, fellow Canadians, I am very proud to be here. We started off on the right foot. You came and visited me in Nunavut and you listened. Now you have shown my fellow Nunavummiut that you actually act on what you listen to. I am very pleased at what you acted on.

To my fellow Nunavummiut, it is nice to be sitting here. I recall one meeting where I wasn't even sitting because our issues weren't acted on. To my fellow colleagues, thank you for your support once again. For the people of Nunavut I believe we have gone a long ways in meeting our real needs in Nunavut in delivering basic health care.

I want to thank my fellow Nunavummiut who have been sitting behind me patiently for the last two days and listening to me and supporting me in these difficult times. You made it easy for us this time. I appreciate that, Prime Minister. I think with the money that you have set aside in this agreement, it

will go a long way in making sure that people who need the help will be receiving it. I often say that I wish everyone good health, but unfortunately at times we do need help when we are in difficult shape. So I appreciate the help of your government and I look forward to tackling many issues with you that we face in Nunavut.

To my colleagues who are sitting around this table, I want health care off the agenda in the next annual Premiers' meeting.

Thank you.

RT. HON. PAUL MARTIN (PMO Canada): Thank you very much, Premier.

Let me just add my voice to those of the Premiers who have thanked so many people. Certainly, the health professionals, the doctors, the nurses, the paramedics right across the country, the frontline caregivers.

I also would like to thank their associations, their representatives who are here who have made such a tremendous input to our discussions.

J'aimerais aussi remercier les fonctionnaires qui ont été impliqués, les fonctionnaires du gouvernement fédéral qui ont travaillé si fort pendant si longtemps pour que notre réunion soit une réussite, et je dois dire les fonctionnaires des gouvernements provinciaux qui ont fait exactement de même.

There were a number of references made to the late night meetings at 24 Sussex. Let me just tell you that there was one point where federal officials, provincial officials, there wasn't a room in the house that they weren't collected in corners. In fact, I woke up this morning, all of two days later, and there were still two provincial officials walking around I think looking for the door.

I want to thank Health Minister Dosanjh. I want to thank the Minister of Public Health, Carolyn Bennett. I want to thank the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lucien Robillard. I want to thank the Minister of Finance, Ralph Goodale. If you will forgive me for doing this, because I worked with him so long, I also want to thank Kevin Lynch, the Deputy Minister, who will be leaving for another post.

And I also want to thank Alex Himelfarb, who is behind me. Let me tell you that I, as Minister of Finance, spent a lot of time saying very nasty things about the Privy Council Office, about PCO. I take some of it back. I have got to say to Alex he did a tremendous job.

I also want to add my voice to what Premier Doer said in terms of the agreement with Quebec, in terms of the nature of the agreement with Quebec, in terms of the recognition by all of the premiers and I think it is very important to understand the leadership that the Premiers took in understanding that in fact the great strength of our country is the diversity of our population and our ability to approach things in different ways and yet with common purposes. So I think, Premier Charest, this was a historic agreement, and I want to thank all of the Premiers for their leadership as well as you, Premier Charest.

Je pense que ça a été vraiment quelque chose de très, très important qui s'est passé aujourd'hui.

I want to say to the Aboriginal leaders who were here, a number of them mentioned that this was a very important agreement. The fact is that the quality of the Aboriginal leadership in this country is also what brought us here.

Then finally let me just say to the Premiers -- si je peux parler aux premiers ministres qui sont autour de la table -- qu'on connaît très bien les difficultés que vous avez devant vous, les obstacles que vous êtes obligés de surmonter, the pressures you face, aging populations, costly technologies, Minister Mar said it again today -- anyone who watched our meetings would have had to have been impressed by the knowledge of the medical system that you as premiers showed.

I think that yesterday was a very good day for Canada, simply in the way in which those issues were addressed by you as Premiers. I hope it gave people just a greater insight into in fact the difficulties that you face and the great progress that you have made.

We made major advances in this agreement, major advances in accountability, major advances in the way of reform. I know that you have been on that path of reform for a long time and the examples of that abound across the country. So let me congratulate all of you on your leadership. Let us congratulate all of us on this agreement.

I have now a very lengthy speech which I am not going to give you.

I am now going to call this meeting to a close. Thank you all.

--- Applause / Applaudissements

--- Whereupon the meeting concluded at 0135 /

La réunion s'est terminée à 0135