

# Premiers should examine own spending habits before criticizing Ottawa, says MP

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"They came up with the number. They told us, 'This is what we need.' They said, 'This is our bottom line.'"

Mr. Wilfert suggested premiers should look at their own spending habits before blindly blaming Ottawa for their troubles.

While he said it's not up to federal politicians to comment on how provinces spend money, he stressed it's unfair for premiers to spend money on programs other than health care or offer tax cuts and then turn around and blame Ottawa for shortfalls.

Mr. Wilfert also disputed the premiers' ongoing claim that federal funding has dropped to 14 cents of every dollar spent on health care.

In an escalating war on words, premiers have demanded the federal government restore its

level of funding to at least 18 cents, the amount Ottawa contributed until shortly after Prime Minister Jean Chretien was elected.

But Mr. Wilfert said premiers conveniently forget to explain about the tax points they enjoy. Ottawa collects taxes and returns this money to the provinces.

Rather than the 14 cents in which the premiers keep referring, Mr. Wilfert said the tax points bring the federal contribution on health care to between 33 and 36 cents, depending on the dollar.

Under the Canada Health Act, medicare costs are supposed to be split between Ottawa and the provinces.

Mr. Wilfert also accused Premier Mike Harris of misleading residents about Ontario's contribution to health care.

While Mr. Harris boasts his government has sunk an addi-

tional \$1.2 billion into health care, Mr. Wilfert insists \$1.1 billion is federal money.

While Mr. Wilfert said nobody disputes the need to reform medicare, he questioned why premiers are jumping the gun when a groundbreaking report on health care from Roy Romanow is due out in the fall.

The premiers have said they can't afford to wait that long and are ready to begin cutting services.

But Mr. Wilfert said his government will not allow the provinces to contravene the principles of medicare.

"We will never agree to any approach that violates the spirit and approach of the Canada Health Act."

The act guarantees medically necessary services are made universally available to Canadians.

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