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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

23 May 1983

*Mr. H. Gray,*

I very much appreciate your letter of 6 May 1983 in which you enclosed resolutions passed by your representative body at Bournemouth. The Conservative Party greatly admires the commitment of the RCN to the National Health Service, and the dedication of RCN members to the service of their patients - principles that were demonstrated clearly during the deplorable industrial action in the Health Service last year.

As I confirmed in the Conservative Party's manifesto we are proud of the way in which the Conservative Government succeeded in shielding the National Health Service from the recession. We doubled spending in cash terms between 1978-9 and 1983-4, an increase in real resources of more than 17 per cent measured against retail prices. The growth in services will have been some 7½ per cent over that period. We have reduced the nurses' working week from 40 to 37½ hours. There were 45,000 more whole-time equivalent nursing and midwifery staff in place by last autumn than there were four years before.

I have stated in Parliament my clear belief that the principle that adequate health care should be provided for all, regardless of ability to pay, must be the foundation of any arrangement for financing the Health Service. The provision of good health care will remain a priority for Conservative Governments in the future. But only if we create wealth can we continue to do justice to the old and the sick and the disabled. It is economic success which will provide the surest guarantee of help for those who need it most.

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We expressed our anxiety in the last Parliament to find adequate arrangements for determining nurses' pay. We believe that the proposal to establish a review body as a new mechanism for the determination of the pay of nurses and midwives which we put forward was a responsible way to recognise the special position of nurses and their refusal to strike.

Yours sincerely

Raymond Delisle

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Trevor Clay, Esq.