

*Medicare*

even though some of the suggestions might require changes in the present legislation.

• (8:30 p.m.)

The final plan to be introduced should not be an infringement on provincial autonomy. This is something which has been emphasized by many speakers, including the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Watson). In this connection I would like to quote this paragraph from an editorial which appeared in the *Globe and Mail*, headed, "The Medicare Pressure Play":

Premier John Robarts was somewhat charitable when he refused this week to interpret as a pressure play Health Minister Allan MacEachen's announcement that the federal medicare plan would proceed on July 1st, 1967, no matter how many provinces had enrolled in it.

You can see, Mr. Speaker, that this editorial appeared a few months ago because the date for implementation of the plan has been changed, but I still think some of the provinces interpret this measure, and the apparent haste with which the government is trying to put it through the house, as a pressure play. There are more immediate problems facing Canada today.

I was interviewed on radio this morning in a report to my constituents, and this is the gist of what I said when dealing with medicare:

The government has announced that medicare will not be brought in until July 1, 1968, at the earliest. This is 20 months from now. But the government insists that we give approval to the plan now, that is, give second reading, approval in principle, to Bill C-227. Now that implementation of medicare has been postponed by the government I consider that there are more immediate problems to be solved. I refer to rising prices, and along with this the plight of the old age pensioners trying to exist on \$75 a month. These are immediate problems. We should be doing more about them now.

Today the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. Martin) said in response to some pressure from the opposition that relief for the old age pensioners would be introduced if we disposed of this medicare bill immediately. However, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) pointed out that there was no reason why the measure providing relief to old age pensioners could not be placed immediately on the order paper.

Other hon. members have referred to the pressing need for a greater number of doctors before a complete medical service plan can be made fully operative. In this connection I wish to refer to a letter written by Dr. R. K. C. Thomson, president of the Canadian

[Mr. Pascoe.]

Medical Association, to the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson), on October 13, copies of which were sent to individual members of parliament. He makes a number of points in his letter and I wish to refer to two of them:

Finally, that the government has been making decisions about the provision of medical services for the people of Canada without adequate consultation with those persons who are expected to supply these services.

That is something which has been dealt with by other hon. members. Another point in the letter is this:

That a universal program will aggravate the existing shortage of medical and other health manpower, particularly in the field of general practice. The alleviation of these acute shortages should be given first priority in spending public funds.

This letter from Dr. Thomson emphasizes the problem, a problem which the government might help solve by postponing the date on which the plan will come into operation.

In addition to the lack of doctors, at present we have insufficient hospitals to cope with the demands for hospital space. I do not know how many hon. members have had to consult doctors and have had the experience of sitting in waiting rooms for two or three hours, and finally discovering how overworked doctors are.

Other hon. members have said that additional money must be devoted to medical research. I do not think anyone will contradict the statement that there is a need for more medical research, and it should be made clear in any government plan that medical training and research should have first priority. That is why I am suggesting that the government's rush to have this bill approved by parliament is not at this time in the best interests of Canadians or of Canada. The whole emphasis of my remarks is to stress that we should take more time to work out a medical services plan that will be fully operative and fully acceptable when it becomes law.

There are many points in Bill C-227 that require more explanation, and in addition some insertions will have to be made to it. I refer to a letter which I have just received from Dr. F. H. McWilliams, a well known and highly qualified optometrist in Moose Jaw, in which he says:

I realize that medicare has been deferred, but would like to bring to your attention some matters in connection with the medical care act as it relates to eye care—