

*Medicare*

effectively administered and meet the needs of the people of our nation. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I believe that an intensive program is required to prepare for the effective implementation of the proposed medical care plan.

I understand that the principle of the bill is financial participation with the provinces in the provision of medical care insurance for all citizens of Canada. The measure now before us is considerably different from that which was first contemplated by the government. I believe that when we reach committee stage further changes will be suggested and I trust they will be accepted by the government.

I do not propose to say anything further at this time, Mr. Speaker, except to point out that we agree there are measures which are far more important at the moment than is the legislation we are now considering. The government has already indicated that this program will not become operative until July 1, 1968. What about the old age pension legislation that has been predicted? The government has already said that legislation will be introduced to assist in meeting the needs of the senior citizens of this country. Why, in the name of common sense, do they not bring that legislation in rather than this measure which will not become effective for another year and a half? I remember another occasion on which the government got its priorities all confused and mixed up, and as a result the activities of this house were hamstrung for weeks and weeks. It may be that the government hopes to gain some political advantage from bringing in this legislation at this time.

**Mr. Woolliams:** Oh, I don't think so!

**Mr. Patterson:** I doubt that it will have this effect. I suggest that countless citizens of Canada would have very much appreciated the government's saying: This legislation will not be implemented for another year and a half; therefore we will proceed with measures that are more urgent and place in a prior position legislation which is so important to the senior citizens of this country.

What about the unification program of the armed forces? This is something that will be implemented in the very near future. I am not arguing for or against unification of the armed forces at the moment, but I say that if this program is to be implemented this fall or early next year, and the medical care plan will not be implemented for a year after that,

why give this measure priority over that with regard to the unification of the forces?

I believe the government has erred seriously in bringing this measure before the house and giving it prior position on the agenda when there are other measures that will have an immediate beneficial effect in our country, once they are dealt with. As I have said, we support the principle of the bill but trust its provisions will be changed when it reaches committee stage in the house.

**Mr. Robert Stanbury (York-Scarborough):** Mr. Speaker, my contribution to this debate will be brief. I had an opportunity to speak to the principle of medicare when the resolution was before the house some weeks ago. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the minister on having responded to the requests and submissions of the members of his party, supporters of the government, to introduce the feature of flexibility with respect to the implementation date of this measure. The minister referred to this flexibility today. There are members of this house who would be so intractable as to destroy the program because it was not identical with their particular idea of what it should be.

**Mr. Orlikow:** It is your idea.

**Mr. Stanbury:** There are others who might run away from this problem and destroy themselves. I should like to pay tribute to a minister who is strong enough and courageous enough to bring into this house a bill in which he believes and one which this country needs, even if it does not completely satisfy all of us in the house.

It is no secret to the house that many members of the Liberal party, supporters of the government, were disappointed at the necessity, as the government saw it, of postponing the implementation date for medicare, but I am grateful that the government has responded to the representations of its own members and has introduced the feature of flexibility which might permit this program to be implemented before July 1, 1968. This bill makes perfectly clear the commitment of the government and I hope that when it is passed, as I am sure it will be, it will make clear the commitment of the Canadian people to the goal of making health services equally accessible to all Canadians wherever they live, whatever their income or disability might be.

When the resolution was being discussed in the house I expressed some puzzlement at the position being taken by the official opposition.