

Medicare

would remove an essential element of the medicare proposal, namely, the necessity for designating a public authority to operate the plan on a non-profit basis in any given province.

Mr. Knowles: Your subclause 2 does that.

Mr. MacEachen: When we come to this point I will be happy to debate it, but the effect of this amendment would be to remove the public administration aspect in the sense that public administration is provided by a public authority. It is true that the amendment implies the existence of an authority or agency designated by the provincial government concerned, but under the amendment the authority itself need not be a public authority. This is an important difference in concept, and in my view it is certainly not an acceptable change to the government.

The hon. member for Halifax spoke about the role of physician-sponsored agencies under any provincial medical care plan. Two of the paragraphs of clause 4 relate to the point which has been raised. One of them is subclause (1) (a) which establishes a public authority.

We have considered within the department and in consultation with the Department of Justice the possible role of a physician-sponsored plan and we think that within paragraph (a) a physician-sponsored plan would be acceptable if it came under the aegis of a public authority. It would require action by a provincial government to enable a physician-sponsored plan to perform its functions as part of a public authority.

Mr. Forrestall: By public authority you mean the department of health?

Mr. MacEachen: The form of the public authority would be up to the provincial government. It might be a department of government or it might be a special commission. But a physician-sponsored plan could provide services as part of the public authority and would retain the kind of role that the medical profession and certain provinces wish to maintain. We have discussed this question and I do not see any insurmountable problem under paragraph (a) of clause 4.

Mr. Forrestall: May I ask the minister a question for clarification purposes? Is the minister suggesting that the provincial authority would be able to utilize the existing infrastructure of the department of health, for example, in the province of Nova Scotia as the

vehicle representing the public authority without the department having to go outside to set up a further extension of that public authority? Would that be acceptable to the government? Failing that, would a two- or three-man commission be acceptable?

Mr. MacEachen: What constitutes the public authority is a matter for the judgment of the provincial government, provided, however, that the provincial public authority meets the criteria set out in clause 4 (1) (a).

Mr. Forrestall: You are contradicting yourself.

Mr. MacEachen: No, Mr. Chairman, there is no contradiction. The answer is that if a provincial government designated its department of health as the provincial authority, or it was so designated by provincial law, or a commission were designated the provincial authority, and it was non-profit making and met the other conditions and so on, then this would be fully consistent with this bill.

Mr. Forrestall: It sounds to me as if the minister is prepared to accept the principles contained in our amendment. If he does not like the way it is framed perhaps he would assist us by offering to change the amendment to the extent that suits him.

Mr. MacEachen: If the amendment as it is now worded were accepted, the provincial government could turn over to any body, including commercial insurance companies, the function of operating and administering a medical care plan. That is the effect of this amendment.

Mr. Rynard: No.

Mr. Enns: Surely the provincial government still has control over recognition of the authority. If it does not wish to recognize an insurance company, it need only keep insurance companies out of this scheme.

Mr. Lewis: But it could recognize it.

Mr. MacEachen: Yes, it could if it wished.

Mr. Lewis: That is the point.

Mr. Rynard: I think the minister agrees in principle, even though he is rejecting my amendment. It puts me in mind of the Pharisees of old following the written law. I am sure all parties in the house realize that the provinces have had more experience in medicare than the federal government. The