

*Medicare*

From a strictly economic standpoint medicare is certainly most desirable. It is argued that the majority of people do get good medical attention but, as the Hall Commission indicated in its report, there are still millions of Canadians living in genteel poverty who are unable to afford medical bills or medical insurance and consequently are not receiving the medical attention they deserve. Thus, although it would be impossible to guess with any certainty the amount of productive labour lost through sickness as a result of the lack of early preventive medical attention, it is well known that there is a staggering loss to our economy when incipient disease lies undetected or worsens because the individual through fear of medical expenses denies himself the advantage of prompt and thorough medical care. Simply stated, from an economic standpoint alone the health of our nation is the most precious of all our resources bar none, and a comprehensive, universal medicare scheme is the best way to husband and improve this basic ingredient of our national welfare. We must recognize the principle that, while an individual's health is a highly personal affair, in many respects his or her good health is of direct benefit to the entire nation.

I do not intend to delve into the details of the plan, but it must be constantly remembered that under our constitution health is a provincial responsibility and therefore federal initiative in this field is limited to encouraging provincial action. The federal proposal of offering the provinces money to support provincial medical care insurance programs which meet certain established standards is a sound one and the wisdom of this principle is amply demonstrated in the tremendous success of the provincial hospital schemes. There is nothing to suggest that a comparable plan for medical insurance will not work equally well. The four conditions to be met by the provinces are that their plans must be comprehensive, universal, government run or supervised, and transferable. All these criteria, as set out in the Hall report, are necessary if we as a nation are to achieve our objective of providing the best medical care to the greatest number at the lowest cost.

It is clearly recognized that any such gigantic scheme, with its long and tortuous history, will be beset with many serious problems. To make this scheme work with maximum efficiency we must accelerate most drastically our plans to provide more facilities for medical research, teaching hospitals,

and an ever-increasing number of doctors without which the plan is grandiose in name but stultified in reaching its true achievements. A veritable crash program with these goals must be initiated immediately. To ensure the success of our national plan the provinces which have evinced a reluctance to participate must again be approached and negotiations continued until we have obtained their acceptance.

To make this plan a living and workable reality the most important consideration should be the role of the doctor. The medical profession, rightly concerned about its integrity and independence, must be treated with tact and delicacy, and its professional status and relationship to patients must be most clearly enunciated. It must be categorically stressed that no matter what system of financing is used there will be no interference with or compulsion in regard to the basic relationship between patient and doctor. Individuals will remain free to choose their own doctors; they will be under no compulsion to use any particular services, and an individual doctor will be free to operate outside the plan if in his judgment he can do so successfully.

In regard to the time for implementing the plan much has been said, and I do not want to burden the house with many further observations. As a staunch advocate of medicare I was disappointed when the government in its wisdom decided to delay the plan for one year, and I made representations opposing this decision. However, the government, responsible for the national interest, decided with reluctance after the most searching debate that in view of present economic conditions a postponement was necessary. Most certainly it was a difficult decision, and as a member of the Liberal party I am prepared to support the government position.

• (4:10 p.m.)

At this time I make one plea. As a new member I have been appalled at times by the prevalence of partisan debate which has too often been indulged in for political advancement at the expense of the national interest. Repetitious, irrelevant debate has crept into our proceedings many times to poison clear thought and distort the issues.

Shining through all the smoke of this debate is one salient point. We now have before us a medicare bill which many members have pleaded for, and worked for, for years. It is the privilege and duty of those who oppose it