

Medicare

We have a duty to the provinces to protect their rights. If the federal government is going to enter the medical field at all, under our constitution I think the only right we have is to vote the money and then give the provinces a perfectly free hand to administer the program. The amendment proposed by the hon. member for Simcoe East calls for clarification of this provision, and I contend it is only carrying out the will of parliament as expressed when we gave the bill second reading. The bill is not clear. As I read it "medical practitioner" might mean anybody concerned with the health of the nation. If the minister, would clarify this definition by saying it includes any person requiring help in the mental field, dentistry, osteopathic services, chiropractic services and physiotherapy, I would be delighted to take my seat. I am sure the hon. member for Simcoe East would be willing to withdraw his amendment.

Parliament is often criticized for not making its will clear to the people. There are many acts on the statute books which they do not understand. I must admit that I do not understand some of the acts on the statute books without a great deal of research into the meaning of some other act or the Interpretation Act. This is just not good enough. Many times we pass the principle of a bill when we do not know the effect it will have on the people.

As far as the question of a money bill is concerned, it seems to me that the right of parliament to control the executive in the spending of the nation's money is fast slipping through our fingers. This is the only opportunity we will have to say how the taxpayers' money is to be spent. We have to fight this matter out on a clause such as this so we will know how the money will be spent right down to the last dollar. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I fully support the amendment for the three reasons I have given: Through this amendment we will be carrying out the will of parliament, protecting provincial rights, and everybody in Canada will know when the bill is passed what their rights are to universal medicare.

Hon. Hugh John Flemming (Victoria-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, the observations which I should like to bring to your attention must of necessity have a certain amount of application to the minister and the government. This matter must be examined very carefully because this is not an ordinary piece of legislation. This legislation is special in comparison with any legislation introduced

into this or any other house of which one has the honour to be a member, because it provides for medicare. This principle applies to legislation concerning education. Medicare and education are a service, and such bills require that we transcend the ordinary bounds of debate because they represent a special situation. I consider that the bill before us is in this category.

The fact that the government have introduced such a bill, and the minister is sponsoring it and piloting it through the house, means that the government must have made up their minds they wished to introduce a bill which would render to the people of Canada the maximum service. Surely we can agree on that principle. Since I do not think there is any argument about this, we must of necessity consider it our business to devise ways and means by which we may contribute to the rendering of the service to the people of Canada at the lowest possible cost. I belong to that school that likes to see the maximum service provided to our people, with some recognition of the fact that there is a consideration involved for which people must pay.

The appeal which you are asked to consider, Mr. Speaker, is from a decision which I consider to be unjustified. I believe that, in the first place, the minister should accept anything that strengthens the intent of the government; and surely the government are not going to argue that they did not intend to make this bill comprehensive?

● (4:50 p.m.)

The bill is intended to provide for partial coverage of the cost of medicare in the provinces and according to the provincial statutes. I think we should agree that in this provision we should not and will not split hairs. If the minister argues that the decision of the chairman is correct and, on the basis of a technicality, this amendment should be ruled out, then I consider the minister is splitting hairs.

Mr. Speaker, it is for you to make the decision, but it seems to me that this amendment is a tremendous improvement. I was sorry that I was not present during the speech made yesterday by the hon. member for Kamloops (Mr. Fulton), but I have read it and I consider his argument to be irrefutable. It seems to me that provided it is the intention of the government to sponsor measures which will contribute to the maximum health care of Canadians the minister could not possibly disagree with anything that has been said by