

Medicare

move will be to subparagraph (f) of clause 2. It so happens that my colleague, the hon. member for Hamilton South, wishes to move an amendment to subparagraph (d) of clause 2.

That being the case, I wonder whether we could deal with subparagraphs (a), (b) and (c) and come to (d), when my colleague could move his amendment and after that we could go on to the various clauses, unless there are other general remarks which hon. members wish to make. We are not asking for the privilege of making general remarks on subparagraph (a) if we could get on to the other clauses. The first amendment that would be moved from this group would be one proposed by the hon. member for Hamilton South, which would be to subparagraph (d).

The Deputy Chairman: Is it understood by the committee that we have completed the discussion on subparagraph (a)?

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Chairman, just before we consider the clauses in detail I wish to make a few remarks in general. I hope the government will give most careful consideration to the point of view outlined by my colleague, the hon. member for Simcoe East, in summarizing the amendments which the official opposition intend to move. That point of view, that principle is quite clear. It is that the federal proposal to participate in a medical insurance plan, a proposal to assist in the extension of prepaid medical coverage, should be founded—I would go so far as to say “must be”, if it is to be proper—on the basis that it seeks to supplement provincial plans and does not dictate to the provinces the form their plans should take. To a number of us, this principle is extremely important.

The hon. member for Simcoe East stated the objective of the approach that all of us have in mind. He outlined the objective as being that medical services, at an adequate level, should be available to all Canadians on a prepaid or insurance basis. The hon. member for Simcoe East stated that we agree that such a plan must receive support from the federal treasury. That is the objective of all of us; but it is surely wrong to ask this committee, in seeking to reach that objective, to proceed on a principle that is unsound, wrong, improper and unnecessary; that is, that, in a field which is primarily under provincial jurisdiction, we would dictate to the provinces the precise form their plans should take. Why put the committee in such an anomalous position? It is unnecessary that this be done.

[Mr. Knowles.]

The federal government can set the lead. The federal government can say to the provinces: We will fill in the gaps in your plan; and if, on the basis of what you think is right, you want to extend coverage to a certain area, we will assist you to do so. But to say in advance, “Before you qualify for any federal assistance you must follow these criteria, and we will determine what medical services will be included and what will not”, is an improper intrusion into a field that is reserved by the constitution for the provinces.

I, therefore, urge the minister to give consideration to these amendments and endeavour to bring about this desired objective, which I believe is well within our grasp now, on a co-operative basis. This can be done by discussion with the provinces in order to find out how far they think they can go now, and then the federal government can assist them in extending that coverage.

● (5:10 p.m.)

This surely is the way to bring about a comprehensive, universally available plan rather than by the club of a fiscal measure seeking to acquire jurisdiction and authority in a field which does not belong to the federal minister. That is the purpose.

Mr. Brewin: May I ask the hon. member a question? What is the basis for his proposition that this matter does not belong in the federal sphere? I know nothing in the British North America Act to justify such a view. He is a member learned in the law, and I would be glad to know where he gets the basis for the statement which he repeated a number of times. My understanding is that the matter of health services is just as much in the federal as in the provincial sphere. I know it is convenient that the administration of the health services be in the provincial sphere but if the hon. member is right I misunderstand the whole situation.

Mr. Fulton: Mr. Chairman, I should have thought that a lawyer of my hon. friend's competence would not require any assistance from me to grasp so simple a matter.

First of all, the field of welfare is well recognized to be within provincial jurisdiction and, generally speaking, every time the federal government has moved into this field it has been only after consultation and with the consent of the provinces. This is conspicuously lacking in this case. Second, any arrangement which requires auditing and, in fact, the co-operation and acceptance of people in the position of medical practitioners on a voluntary