

Medicare

profession. We have also stated that any province is free on its own responsibility and at its own expense to add additional professions to any plan it sets up. We have also stated that the federal government is prepared, as this plan develops and as provinces wish and as a consensus develops, to consider the addition of further services in the field of health and to pay contributions for those services. That has been the policy stated since the very beginning by the Prime Minister and restated by members of the government. It is the policy that is embedded and embodied in this particular bill and it ought not to come as a surprise to members of this committee.

We all appreciate that there are other services in the health field. The hon. member for Simcoe East has referred to a great number of paramedical services including eye refractions, dental care, the services of optometrists, physiotherapists, nurses, osteopaths, podiatrists, chiropractors and other health professionals. We quite frankly admit that these additional professions are not covered by this bill. We never said they would be covered but we have said that as a consensus develops within the provinces we are prepared to add further services and share the cost of those services with the provinces. We will be prepared to give consideration to that addition as the provinces develop their own plans. This has been the policy from the very beginning and it is the policy now before the house.

There is undoubtedly in various quarters of the house a desire to add further professions. We were castigated by a distinguished gentleman in the opposition at the resolution stage, the hon. member for Kamloops, for our financial irresponsibility in proposing this limited phase of health insurance, namely, medical care. We are now urged by the opposition to add every single health profession in existence to the bill. I do not make any point of that except to say that the addition of every single profession adds additional costs to the treasury and adds additional costs to the provinces. I take the view that if the amendments placed before the house to include the paramedical professions had been in order and I had accepted them on behalf of the government I would have been breaking faith with the proposals made by the federal government to the provinces.

• (9:20 p.m.)

We have had consultations with the provinces on several occasions. They know what we are proposing to do, namely, make contributions with respect to services provided by

medical practitioners. We cannot on our own account, without consultation, now say that we are going to make proposals to the provinces for the inclusion of optometrists and all the other allied professions. I suggest that if we were to do that and were to accept this amendment, this bill would be delayed and we would have to begin a new round of discussions with the provinces. There is a further point. Hon. gentlemen may say, that is what you ought to do, but, Mr. Chairman, I think it would be necessary to do so before changing the concept of our proposals at this stage.

Mr. Winkler: You have lots of time.

Mr. MacEachen: I think we ought to take a look at what has been provided in provincial medical care plans. Hon. gentlemen seem to overlook the magnitude of the step that is now being taken, a step that involves the—

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): Mr. Chairman, on a point of order, the minister is missing the import of my question. I suggested to the minister that during the debate at the resolution stage we were forced to accept the principle of the legislation because the minister himself assured the house that certain amendments could be considered. The minister is now telling us that this is a selective type of legislation, and he is actually admitting that the legislation is discriminatory as between different professions. I should like to point out before I sit down—

Mr. MacEachen: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): I am still on my point of order, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. MacEachen: There is no point of order here.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): I am still on my point of order.

Mr. MacEachen: On a point of order, Mr. Chairman—

The Deputy Chairman: Order, please. The Chair would like to hear the balance of the remarks of the hon. member.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): I am still on my point of order, Mr. Chairman. I am just coming to my point of order, namely, that during the discussion of the various points raised at the resolution stage many hon. members pointed out just as an illustration that the inclusion of optometrists—