

Medicare

Mr. Forrestall: I accept and thank you for your advice on the understanding that I will be permitted to amend paragraph (b) in the way I have indicated at the conclusion of our discussion.

The Chairman: Have we now completed our discussion of paragraph (b)?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

On paragraph (c).

Mr. Forrestall: Mr. Chairman, subject to your earlier advice I now move:

That the semicolon at the end of paragraph (b) be removed and the word 'and' be inserted therein, that the entire content of paragraph (c) be deleted and that paragraph (d) be renumbered as paragraph (c).

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, this is a very important amendment in the sense that if it were accepted it would remove the necessity of any proportion of a provincial population being included in a provincially administered medical care plan. As I understand the amendment, if 10 per cent or 15 per cent were covered by a provincial plan it would be eligible for contributions from the federal government.

We have put in the proportion of 90 per cent as a start, rising to 95 per cent, because in this higher range of proportion of the population exist those individuals most in need of medical care insurance. As we reduce the proportion requirement we reduce the effectiveness of the plan. The maximum effectiveness exists at the maximum proportion of participation.

I do not wish to detain the committee on this point but we did debate it on second reading. The universality concept is contained in this paragraph and if the amendment were accepted this concept would be completely destroyed. I have a number of procedural objections I could present but I will not mention them as it might be better to have a vote on the substance of this concept rather than having the amendment ruled out of order on the basis of a procedural argument.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Chairman, may I point out very briefly that we are also opposed to this amendment. As the minister has pointed out, this is the paragraph in the bill which carries out the government's commitment that coverage shall be universal. While we quarrel a little with his definition of "universality" because of his 90 per cent and 95 per cent figures, we do not register a strong protest in that respect. Certainly 90 per cent or 95 per

cent is closer to 100 per cent than the zero per cent which might be possible as a result of the amendment. We feel that one of the cardinal principles of a plan like this must be its universality. Therefore we feel paragraph (c) must remain and we shall oppose any amendment to delete it.

Mr. MacLean (Queens): Mr. Chairman, it seems obvious that the amendment will be defeated but before the discussion is terminated I should like to say a word or two. I agree that the objective we all have in mind is something which approaches universal coverage. We all realize that complete coverage is probably an unattainable objective and that we must settle for 90 per cent at first and 95 per cent later. However, this creates an anomaly because the remaining people who are not covered are in a sort of official limbo. Why should we ever be satisfied with anything less than 100 per cent coverage and why are the people left out not as important as the 95 per cent to be covered.

● (4:10 p.m.)

The minister no doubt recognizes that this is an impractical objective and therefore he compromises, puts in 90 per cent and then says, "So far as universality is concerned we will be satisfied with that". It is too late now, but I suggest to the minister that instead of having this sort of thing it would have been more sensible to say that the federal government and the people of Canada are prepared to make their contribution to all interested persons in a province under an approved plan and so on, over the first 5 per cent. Then you would have the incentive to try to achieve 100 per cent instead of having the arbitrary figure of 90 per cent or 95 per cent and saying that for the purpose of this bill so far as we are concerned we will consider that for the time being to be universality.

Mr. Rynard: Mr. Chairman, I wish to say a few words on this point. Instead of the 90 per cent I believe we could, if necessary, start at a lower figure. In the province of Ontario now I understand that 90 per cent of the people are covered by insurance of one type or another. I do not know why we have to be so dictatorial and say that 90 per cent of the people have to be covered right off the bat or there will be no plan. I do not think this is right. I think some leeway should be given. The minister knows that in the long run the people are not going to pay for a plan—and they will be paying for it because the federal government will be paying part of it—and not reap the benefits.