

Medicare

federal treasury is willing to participate in the cost of those services.

If the minister says to me that that means that we shall be paying for one set of services in one province and for another set of services in another province, I say to him that is exactly what the bill now provides. In fact, this bill now provides that if provinces a, b, and c should choose not to have a medical care plan for the next two or three years they will not get a penny out of the federal treasury toward medical services, and those provinces with medicare plans will get 50 per cent of the cost of qualifying plans. Surely that is the principle of this bill. The principle of this bill is that when a provincial legislature has used the constitutional powers it has to establish a medicare plan, the federal treasury will contribute 50 per cent of the cost of services.

All we have been asking is to extend the area toward which the minister can make that contribution. The minister's argument is that this means we are establishing priorities or taking rights from the provinces, that he needs another conference with the provinces. It seems to me that is entirely specious. It will be up to each province to decide what services it wants in its own plan. When the provinces decide that, this bill will provide assistance to them to encourage them to expand those health services until they cover the entire spectrum of health care, preventative as well as curative.

I rose to my feet because it seemed to me that the minister, in the explanation he gave, either misunderstood or adroitly turned on its head the proposition put to him by members in the opposition. And while he may adroitly turn things on their head, it seems to me that none of the people of Canada, and certainly no member of this house, will fail to see the rather unnecessary adroitness which he exhibited today.

Mr. Baldwin: To put the proposition enunciated by the hon. member for York South in specific terms, let us say that a province introducing enabling legislation bringing into effect the provisions of this act says that for the purposes of its act practitioners of medicine shall include chiropractors, osteopaths and homeopaths. I refer to osteopaths and homeopaths specifically because they are registered under the medical professions act in the province of Alberta. I should also include optometrists. If in a province's enabling legislation a declaration of this kind were made, what would be the minister's position?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, the answer is obvious from the bill.

Mr. Bell (Carleton): Well, what is the answer?

Mr. Brand: In a spirit of co-operation, knowing the difficult time the minister has undergone in the last few hours—I sympathize with him because of the morass of his own making, in which he finds himself—I should like to know whether the minister would accept the sort of amendment I shall refer to in a moment. The minister has objected to amendments because they meant the spending of more money. The kind of amendment I propose would mean the spending of less money. Would the minister be willing to consider an amendment which might read something like this?

No provision of this act shall be interpreted to prevent any medical practitioner from practising outside a provincial medical plan, or any insured resident from receiving reimbursement from the plan for the costs of insured medical services incurred from a qualified medical practitioner who is not a member of a plan.

As the minister has said, undoubtedly some provinces may not come in right away, but a person visiting in those provinces could be reimbursed for costs incurred when he was away from home if this amendment should carry. Would the minister agree to this?

● (10:00 p.m.)

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Chairman, I want the amendment before me. I am not quite sure what it means. From what I can gather of its meaning, it is that this parliament will attempt to determine the arrangements which exist between the provincial government and the medical profession. If that is the meaning of the amendment and the effect of it, then I think it would be difficult for me to accept it. As the bill is now drawn it gives freedom to any province to enter into arrangements with the medical profession so that a member of the profession may work outside any plan if he so wishes. It gives freedom to any patient to accept or not accept insured services. I would think that from our point of view it would be much better to leave these arrangements to the provinces and the medical profession. Our bill gives them full freedom to work out their own arrangements. We would not impose any arrangement upon them and I think that is the preferable situation.

Mr. Brand: May I call it ten o'clock, Mr. Chairman?

Progress reported.