

*Medicare*

with the calculation of the federal contribution was drawn up. This federal contribution will be equal to 50 per cent of the national per capita cost of insured services incurred by the province for the year, multiplied by the average for the year of the number of insured persons; this number is calculated along the same lines as that for which provision is made in the Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act. In the present bill the methods for the calculation of the per capita cost, of the number of insured persons, and of the cost incurred by the province, are described.

As members are aware, preliminary estimates of cost based on figures relating to the cost of physicians' services in all the provinces, and projected to the original commencement date of the program, were discussed with the provinces. The federal contribution amounting to one-half of the cost, which I placed before you during my statement introducing the debate on the resolution, was \$340 million with respect to a full year based on projected figures obtained in September, 1965. A postponement in the date of commencement will, of course, affect that amount somewhat. But it should be emphasized that the federal contribution will remain one-half of the actual per capita cost, regardless of commencement date.

The bill also incorporates the fourth principle relating to portability from province to province of insured status. The method set out in the bill is substantially the same as that which is now in effect across the country in the hospital insurance programs. It ensures that persons who are temporarily absent from their home province will continue to benefit from the medical care plan provided through the home province, and it also requires that residents moving from one province to another shall continue to be so covered during any waiting periods.

As I pointed out in my opening remarks during the resolution debate, these basic provisions are of national concern and the principle involved has never been questioned at any time by any of the provincial health ministers.

Mr. Speaker, since this legislation was last before the house a decision has been taken to defer the starting date of medicare. I do not propose to go into the reasons for this change, the necessity for which I greatly regret, as do my colleagues in the government. The fact that this alteration in the starting date has no bearing on our commitment to the principle

[Mr. MacEachen.]

of medicare is demonstrated by the fact that we are introducing this bill for second reading today. The substance of the medical care program remains intact in the bill and the house will have an opportunity to confirm these principles in the adoption of the second reading of the bill. The decision to defer the starting date of medicare was based and continues to be based on the government's assessment of the situation as related to economic conditions in the country. If the government had to make the decision to day it would be the same decision, but we are determined to proceed not later than July 1, 1968.

As the government we have the responsibility to ensure that in 1968 the introduction of medicare will have top priority and to adapt all our plans and programs to that end. In the meantime the government will keep financial and economic conditions under close scrutiny, as it must in any event. Nothing will please the government more than to be able to proceed earlier than July 1, 1968. We do not feel now that we could and should advance the date, but there will be sufficient flexibility in the legislation to advance the date if future conditions make that possible. I will be moving in committee appropriate amendments to imbed this principle of flexibility in the legislation.

There is only one further comment I have to make and that is to express to members of the house my appreciation for the interest which has been shown in connection with this very significant program and to express the hope that we may see this law placed on the statute books as a further milestone on the road of progress in social security in our country.

**Mr. Aiken:** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I may ask the minister a question? In reply to a question earlier today he stated that the government did not intend to send this bill to a standing committee of the house but wishes it to be dealt with in committee of the whole house where, as we all know, witnesses are not heard. Can the minister give the house any reason why the government has decided to take away the ability to call in witnesses and discuss the bill informally in a standing or special committee of the house?

**Mr. Douglas:** Is that not what the Hall Commission did?