

might well be considered in connection with the bill before us.

Another matter of concern is whether adequate facilities are available. Supposing there is only one emergency number and a great many people are calling in. Might not a situation arise where calls could not be sorted out quickly and correctly? Then again, an emergency number must harmonize with the normal numbering pattern of exchanges. In some exchanges a five-digit calling system is employed. In others, a seven-digit system. Some of the smaller exchanges use only two or three digits. We should also remember that emergency centres are vulnerable to wide fluctuations in load, so it would seem essential to engineer overflow call answering arrangements.

Then again, personnel at control centres need to be familiar with local conditions. Experience has shown the need for emergency calls to be directed to locations where the recipient has a good knowledge of the local geography and the facilities available, since people calling in emergencies tend to use local or common names for locations, names which could be meaningless to a remote control centre. Obviously, this is one of the problems to be considered, though I believe it can be overcome.

As I say, I welcome the intent of the bill. I have no doubt many lives would have been saved if people had been able to call for assistance quickly enough in an emergency. I urge the government and the industry to pursue this matter as rapidly as possible so that an emergency number system such as 911—and that number is a good one to use—might be available in every community in Canada.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech made by the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Mather). I want to say I do not believe consideration of this measure by a committee of the House, and its eventual enactment, should founder on the rocks of technological difficulties. I am satisfied the ingenuity of man is such that those difficulties can be overcome quickly, and for this reason I think we ought to support the bill and that it ought to be sent to committee without further debate. I end my speech here.

Mr. Jack Cullen (Sarnia-Lambton): Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to take part in this debate but having listened very carefully until 5.30 this morning to very fine speeches, I was moved to feel that perhaps I should now say a few words on this subject.

● (1620)

The hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Mather) might be surprised to know that he and I are kindred spirits or have a kindred feeling toward this kind of legislation. In the few years I have been here he has become known as a member who introduces legislation, not so much in the expectation that it will be adopted but as a prod to the appropriate officials, through debate in the House of Commons, to move very quickly.

I agree with the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) that the subject matter of the bill will commend itself to every member of the House, but I am somewhat apprehensive about having a universal number. I say that for this reason: in talking of a universal number

Emergency Telephone Number

we are talking of emergencies as though they were of a particular type or series. In this regard I have in mind a splendid program called Medic Alert. A specific kind of expertise is required to cope with Medic Alert emergencies. I would be somewhat apprehensive that insufficient consideration would be given to the Medic Alert program if we were to implement this kind of legislation without giving it the thought and discussion it deserves.

I have a daughter who is allergic to penicillin and she must wear a Medic Alert badge. There is a number on the badge that must be called so that the expertise required is immediately available. I would be concerned if someone at the other end of the line who was prepared to handle a traffic victim, or a heart attack or an epileptic seizure emergency, did not have specific knowledge of this particular kind of emergency. It seems to me this would work to the detriment of the individual that you were trying to help, rather than work to his or her benefit. So I file that caveat with regard to anyone considering implementing this kind of approach in the interests of doing what I am sure in all our hearts we feel is the right and proper thing to do.

Very close to my community in the city of Sarnia is the city of London, approximately 60 miles away. I am not exactly sure of the date, but an article appeared in *Communications Business* of June, 1972, indicating that London was the first city in Ontario to use a 911 number for emergencies. The article describes how the system works. Five police constables operate the system which will be installed in the new police administration building in that city.

I would ask myself whether these gentlemen are properly trained in the approach that should be adopted if an individual, who had a shot of penicillin he should not have had, contacted them. What kind of treatment would they receive? I would be a little apprehensive that this might be thought to be the be-all and end-all because it is the easy way. I hope that the people on the other end of the telephone line appreciate the kind of assistance they might be called upon to give.

I have one further comment. It seems to me the bill is redundant in that the principal telephone companies subject to federal jurisdiction, namely Bell Canada and British Columbia Telephone, have already expressed willingness to supply the service and to co-operate with the municipalities in this regard. I suggest, with respect, that this is where the impetus should come from, not in this particular instance from the government or from this parliament. The expertise is with Bell and British Columbia Telephone and with all provincial telephone companies who know how the system works and the kind of problems that arise. I do not think these would be brought before the committee of the House if the subject matter of the bill were referred to committee for study.

A position statement from Bell Canada, as well as a memorandum from TCTC outlining the situation across the country, was attached to the notes that I have received. It seems to me we have to be careful that we do not move too quickly in a technical field like this, with a group of laymen, albeit intelligent laymen, sitting around a table endeavouring to cope with sophisticated pieces of equipment and a very important subject.