

Medicare

Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland. It is of interest to note that the earliest health services plan was Newfoundland's cottage hospital medical plan, which dates from 1934. The Saskatchewan medical care insurance plan began in 1962, the Alberta medical plan in 1963 with extensions in 1966, the British Columbia medical plan in 1965 and, of course, in my province the Ontario medical services insurance plan began in 1966. The Saskatchewan and Newfoundland plans are universal in coverage; enrolment in the other plans is on a voluntary basis. Together, these five provincial health insurance plans cover about 4 million Canadians. In particular, approximately 1,700,000 people are enrolled in the Ontario medical services insurance plan, or 25 per cent of the population of Ontario.

From the British North America Act, Supreme Court decisions, declarations of royal commissions and federal-provincial arrangements and negotiations, we regard health matters today as mostly a provincial responsibility. But since it has been customarily the primary objective of the federal government in the health field to assist with the development of vital and essential services on a nation-wide basis, this government's action in offering financial contributions to provincial health insurance plans is most welcome. This federal initiative will also meet, I am sure, the need to develop comparable standards of health services across this vast country.

May I reiterate, Mr. Speaker, the accepted principle that adequate standards across the country should always be maintained as much as possible. Not all the medical plans now operating provincially provide the same benefits. The British Columbia plan, I learn, provides such additional services as physiotherapy, special duty nursing, chiropractic and naturopathy services without additional charge. May I add that I have received many communications from my constituents that there is a great need also for insured ambulance services. But above all, the great discrepancy in premiums is a serious complaint that is often heard from our constituents.

In Saskatchewan, a province less affluent than Ontario, the premium, which covers about 25 per cent of total costs, is only \$24 for a family. In the affluent provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario the family premiums are in the order of \$150 per year. I again ask the question: If the federal government is going to pay half the cost of

provincial health insurance plans, why could not the provinces reduce the annual premiums of their plans?

Mr. Speaker, I know it is very difficult to satisfy everybody and that no plan is absolutely perfect, but in trying to produce a health insurance plan for Canadians we should strive to come up with the best possible plan. Therefore I appeal to all members to support this bill. We should all be proud to be part of this federal parliament which has been given the privileged opportunity to make available for Canadians a national comprehensive health insurance plan.

Mr. Eric A. Winkler (Grey-Bruce): Mr. Speaker, the address of the parliamentary secretary to which we have just listened was obviously made to support the government's position because of the embarrassment which they feel, and what he said is in no way realistic so far as the Canadian people are concerned. The hon. member mentioned at length the plans that exist in the provinces. He even referred to how they were instituted. I remind him immediately that there are now four plans in operation and not one was instituted by a Liberal government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Winkler: I repeat, Mr. Speaker, that not one was instituted by a Liberal government, and I dare the hon. member to deny that statement. What is more, a fifth plan will be in effect soon and it will be instituted by a Conservative government. I believe that such nonsense as was delivered by the hon. member demands an apology even to us on the opposition side of the house. When I think of the things from which the Canadian people have benefited in the course of this year, 1966, because of the action of the opposition, I sometimes wonder what this government is doing.

I believe that some of the ministers of the government are afraid to come into the house. Last night I tried to get the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Greene) into the house in order to learn his position with regard to milk subsidies. He would not come and sent his parliamentary secretary. I think of the position in which he has put himself with the farmers of this country and I have come to the conclusion that the government will find itself in exactly the same position with regard to medicare.

The previous speaker said he cannot understand the position of the opposition because