

Medicare

Now, Mr. Chairman, I support the remarks made by other hon. members. I do not intend to repeat the excellent arguments made by the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam or the excellent arguments by the hon. member for Fraser Valley and others. I do believe, however, that this bill should be amended so that it will include the services which can be provided by dentists, optometrists, chiropractors, osteopaths, naturopaths, serologists, physiotherapists, and other practitioners of the healing arts. Like the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam, I believe that if the minister would only agree to what is included in our amendment this would greatly improve the services which can be rendered under the provisions of this bill. All of us have received numerous briefs from organizations representing the professions I have mentioned, from church organizations, labour organizations, and from other groups which are interested in ensuring that this bill is as good as possible under the present circumstances.

I have in my hand a letter, which I opened only this afternoon, from the Registrar of the University of British Columbia. This letter terminates with the following paragraph:

Resolved, that the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of British Columbia urges the federal government and all members of parliament to amend Bill C-227 so as to permit compensation for those insured services which dentists are especially qualified to perform, when they are rendered by dentists.

When the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam moved his amendment I was very pleased to note that the minister rose in his seat and stated that he wished some time to consider the amendment. I trust that the minister has had some representations from members of his own party to the effect that the bill which he is presenting to the house is too limited and prevents the introduction of the services which people require. I might say that the Department of Veterans Affairs has pioneered in this field. When the veteran requires it, they will permit the veteran to receive many of the privileges which we are asking to be included in this bill at this time. This is the situation also in respect of compensation boards in some provinces. Even some of the private schemes which are in effect at the present time make provision for the inclusion of some of the privileges which have been mentioned by speakers in this debate.

In conclusion, therefore, along with the others who have spoken on this amendment, I do urge that the minister give consideration to

[Mr. Herridge.]

amending the bill as suggested by the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam. Then, at least, the provinces will have the option to include the services which they feel their people require. There are some people who have indicated their support for all the services we have mentioned. Others have indicated their support for some of the services we have mentioned. If the minister could see his way clear to amend the bill to make it possible for the provinces themselves to include those services which they think are required by their people, then we would have a bill which would be much wider in scope than the present bill and one which would be fair to all the provinces concerned.

Mr. Tremblay: Mr. Chairman, I have followed closely the debate on second reading and yesterday's debate on Bill No. C-227.

It appears, at least to me, that in certain quarters of the house, the purpose and the very nature of the bill now before us have not been understood. The purpose of this bill is not to set up a federal insurance plan, because it says so, and I think reference has to be made to the title of the bill itself to understand its nature and its purpose: an act to authorize the payment of contributions by Canada. In other words, a money bill. Had the federal government assumed full responsibility for medical care services, it would have introduced a bill accordingly and established criteria whereby people could go and see any medical practitioner or specialist, be billed accordingly and then apply directly to the federal government for a refund.

But it is because provincial responsibility has been made abundantly clear, as far as medical care services are concerned, that we are now considering an appropriation bill, that is a bill which, subject to certain conditions, authorizes the federal government to make financial contributions not to individuals belonging to a medical plan but to the various governments which have established, under the constitution, their own medical plan for their own citizens.

This appropriation bill has a very definite purpose, and that is to have some uniformity in assistance programs across the country. Contrary to what could have been done under a federal act specifying in detail the terms under which it would apply, this bill provides four basic criteria, and any present or future provincial plan conforming to those four basic criteria will make the province concerned eligible to receive 50 per cent of the costs of such a plan.