

BULK-BILLING, PROPOSED CHANGES

**1. Mr A.P. O'GORMAN to the Minister for Health:**

Can the minister outline some of his concerns about the Commonwealth Government's proposed changes to bulk-billing?

**Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:**

I thank the member for his question and for his efforts to support the family doctors in his area, particularly in this regard. I am deeply concerned about some of the so-called leaks currently coming out of the negotiations of the federal Cabinet on these issues. There is no doubt at all that the federal Government is deliberately attempting to undermine the Medicare system. One need only go back over the past few years. In 1987 John Howard told radio listeners that he would take a scalpel to Medicare. He said that bulk-billing would not be permitted for anyone except pensioners and the disadvantaged. It was obvious where all the money that people put into the system would go. Is it any wonder that doctors themselves are now becoming confused, when in 1995 John Howard totally changed his tune? Remember, this is the Prime Minister who never says never. He said that Medicare was here to stay, and that he believed Medicare should be available to everybody. That was part of his party's policy, and would not change. However, we see today that the Commonwealth is again changing its tune, proposing to reward general practitioners for bulk-billing pensioners and concession card holders. That can only mean that that will not happen for anybody else. An attempt is being made to create a two-tiered system of health, which will rely on whether a person has a concession card to get into the public system, or a credit card, as in America, to pay for the health system. It is an absolute shame and a disgrace.