

ment to children. It stated the objectives simply: to see Canadian girls and boys better educated, better protected and better nurtured so that they can make their own contributions to Canada's future.

Last December we completed another major step by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Prime Minister ratified the convention with great pride because it was an illustration of Canada's belief that children, indeed the world's children, matter. Now we have before us in this budget the outline of the proposed new child benefit program.

I believe, honourable senators, it is a major step forward. I know not everyone in this chamber would agree with me, but I can only interpret the program that we are promised as I see it from many years' involvement in social policy. It is a \$2 billion step forward towards improving federal support for children and for families. The new proposed child benefit will consolidate the existing family allowance, the child tax credits and the dependent child credit into a single monthly cheque beginning January of 1993. The child benefit will also include an additional amount for the low income working family—the working poor as they are commonly known, and that additional benefit will top up at \$500 per family.

● (1600)

It is a big step and I am quite happy about it. It builds on existing federal programs which total \$15 billion annually for children and for families. It supports the roles of other governments and organizations. The most important thrust that I see is that it sets the stage for further important steps in this area of social policy concern.

We have had a bit of a patchwork over the years. There have been perhaps 20 separate occasions when these programs have been added to and adjusted by legislation or by a motion in the other place and approved here. Perhaps we are now going to get something that is a little more organized.

There are some key aspects, honourable senators, to the proposed new child benefit package. It is simpler, as you have read. It is one monthly cheque, there is no red tape and it is not taxable. It is fairer. It is designed for the children who need it the most; it is designed for low-income working parents and it is based on family income, not on the lower income of two adults living together or a husband and wife with only one income taken into consideration, which really put a heavy tax on couples.

It is more generous, with \$2 billion spread over five years. As you search the Estimates you will find the \$500 supplement. All families with a joint income of less than \$50,000 will gain. The proposed benefit package gives a faster response to changes in family circumstances. That is very important. It is also fiscally responsible, and, unless programs are fiscally responsible, there is little guarantee that they will have any longevity.

There are some basic elements in the new child benefit package that I should highlight. There is one annual benefit per child, which is divided, of course, into 12 monthly payments. There is a supplement for three or more children of \$75

per child per year. There is also the \$213 supplement for children under seven. That amount, of course, is per year. The benefit reduces at \$25,900 net for the family income, and there is a new earned income supplement. That income supplement starts kicking in at \$3,750 and at the rate of 8 per cent of the earned income; it starts phasing out at about \$21,000. The maximum for the working poor is \$500 per family.

It has certain impacts on family. The level of benefit is the same for all families in the same category. The winners are the larger families, which will receive more. Families with \$10,000 to \$20,000 earned income will get the full \$500 bonus. Those are the working poor again. Virtually all the single parent families will find themselves in a stronger position, as will the vast majority of one-earner families and the majority of two-earner families. The high-income families, of course, are the losers.

Money alone, as we all know, was not the solution. Many children in our country are at risk. They are hungry, they are abused, they are neglected. I was pleased to learn, when I listened to the minister's comments and read his statements, that he is going to start negotiating with the provinces, with our native people and with other community leaders to develop a program to assist children at risk. He has promised us that package, honourable senators, in the very near future. We are all looking forward to the details that we will find there.

When your committee was looking at this problem we were again dismayed at the poverty and the results of poverty to which native children were subjected, and the circumstances in which they were forced to live. It was very depressing to hear the witnesses talk about such poverty. Although we knew that our aboriginal children were the most at risk and the poorest of our children, it was brought home time and again by the witnesses.

As the minister negotiates and discusses these matters with, and learns from, our native leaders, and as he learns from our provincial and community leaders, it will be most interesting to see the end result as they collectively develop programs to strengthen the environment for these children, because we simply cannot allow them to live the lives they are currently living. We have to do better for them.

The problems facing these children are multitudinous, especially for those living in poverty, whether families of the working poor or families on social assistance. I know that some of you have asked why the children in that second group, those who are living in families which must exist on social assistance, are not being helped more, when the working poor are being helped more. There are very few federal government programs that will help the working poor. This is one of the first times that a strong program is starting to emerge which will give those working poor parents some encouragement.

The very cost of working has never been considered in regard to their take-home pay. I hope the minister will come back to deal with those living on social assistance alone. As you know, that is the group that is paid for jointly by the provinces and the federal government. In a previous study