

Private Members' Business

to any province that cuts down in terms of education, health care or social services for any child.

A similar experience happened in the United States when singing Jim Folsom, the governor of Tennessee, decided that he was going to use welfare money for children for other purposes. The federal government in the United States had enough guts to cut off the money and force him to meet the standards. We can do the same thing with reluctant premiers here in this country. They are not reluctant because they are mean people, Mr. Speaker. They are reluctant because they are largely unaware of how serious the problem is for children in this country.

I want to comment about some of the changes that I have seen as I conclude my remarks. Some of the changes are in the use of alcohol and other drugs.

I hear pious words about a war on drugs. The most serious drug affecting children in our society and almost condoned by many parents is alcohol. There are some parents who actually believe that they are relieved that their kids are drinking beer or booze and not using drugs. Alcohol is a drug and it is a violently abused drug here in this country simply because in many instances it is pushed on kids through some of the advertising that is subtle but direct.

The last comment I want to make is about child sex abuse. The Badgley Report initiated by the Liberal government is a masterful example of the use of the House to bring information to legislators. The government is to be commended for releasing the Badgley Report, an outstanding piece of work showing unanimity about gathering facts. The Badgley Report, after gathering facts, is now gathering dust.

The statistics on increasing sexual abuse of children in this country are alarming and inexcusable and regrettably have reached into institutions where we never expected to encounter such behaviour. We have never as a nation made a commitment to ensure that a whole range of services are available for every child in this country regardless of race, creed or colour and that the services are available on the basis of the needs of the child rather than having the child fit into the services that the state thinks it needs. That means flexibility. It means some caution, some prudence and some under-

standing that at the bottom of all of this is money and a commitment.

I will be the first to go public and praise the Tory government if it accepts this motion, passes it and puts its money behind it. But if this is just to be another exercise for an afternoon, all of us being good and talking about the needs of children, then forget it. It will go down as another cynical and hypocritical afternoon. This is a rare chance in the legislative process to do something that means something for all of us and to back it up with money. I beg the government to take the chance.

Mr. Patrick Boyer (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the Hon. Member for Mission—Coquitlam for placing this motion before the House because it gives us a chance to visit a subject sorely in need of greater attention. I rise to speak because I share her concern that we must do all that is possible to protect children and ensure their rights.

There are a lot of things that have happened in this century that would make us wonder whether civilization is advancing. But one of the marks of civilization perhaps is the extent to which we take care and consideration for the weaker, the more vulnerable, the voiceless, be they minorities, individuals with disabilities, the environment, animals, and most of all children. An effort to curb the strong is sometimes needed but efforts to uphold the weak is very much always there. A mark of how we can make progress on that is perhaps more than anything a mark of how civilized we are.

A comprehensive Canadian bill of rights for children is an admirable concept. But, in fact, there is a more immediate and practical alternative before us to accomplish the very same objective. I refer, as the hon. member herself did, to the United Nations Draft Convention on the Rights of the Child. This important international convention is expected to be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly later this year. Once adopted, the convention will be open to ratification by all countries, including Canada. States that become party to that international convention will be bound by the specific provisions, as the hon. member has pointed out, and the obligations that are contained in it.