

As the Hon. Member stated, in the past Canada has introduced a mechanism to combat inflation eating away at something like the family allowance. The value of the family allowance cheque would diminish year after year as inflation grows. I think all of us were pleased at the progressive initiative taken by the Minister of Finance some years ago with that indexation.

One of the very first actions of the Conservative Government was to grab money from the children of Canada by taking money from the family allowance cheque and the child tax deduction. It grabbed money from the child tax credit. I do not know if Canadians really appreciate the fact that it was one of the very first things the Conservative Government did.

Even Ronald Reagan commented that this indexation was one of the ways governments can provide better levels of financial support in order to provide for children in our countries. I thank my hon. colleague for his interjection and reminder of the fact that even right-wingers in the United States index these critical programs so that their young children will not be severely handicapped in the amount of money that will justly go to them from federal fiscal payments.

As I indicated earlier, I look forward to the campaign when Canadians can decide whether they want a nuclear submarine or a set of decent child care facilities.

● (1710)

Mrs. Barbara Sparrow (Calgary South): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be able to participate in the debate today on Bill C-144 with respect to Canada's Child Care Act. First, I would like to congratulate the chairman of the child care task force, the Hon. Member for Lincoln (Mrs. Martin) and her colleagues, the Hon. Member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Belsher), the Hon. Member for Niagara Falls (Mr. Nicholson) and the Hon. Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Duguay). They certainly gave a great deal of their time and energy as they travelled across this country hearing from many groups and individuals. It was very interesting to read the report of the task force and note there were people who supported non-profit child care as well as people who supported commercial day care. They all gave extremely good representations. There were a number of people who appeared before the task force who felt very strongly that children should first be at home and gave some excellent reasons why they felt women should be supported in the home so they could take care of their families.

Members of the Opposition Parties, as well as some of the media, have criticized the Government's child care program because it has not imposed national standards. They claim that strong national leadership is not possible without national standards and that we will have a balkanization of day care across Canada with widely varying standards. Such criticism misses on two fronts. It misunderstands the nature of Canada and it misunderstands the fundamental role of standards. Canada is not a small, unified, monolithic country. A number of visitors from European countries with expertise in child care

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have expressed admiration for the multifaceted, pluralistic nature of Canada. They have expressed the sentiment that they would like to be in such a position where they could in fact observe and benefit from a variety of approaches and models which address regional differences rather than being hindered by an inability to allow creative and innovative approaches without having to make changes in their monolithic standards.

Child care in Canada is, in many ways, in its early formative stages. To prejudice the ultimate or final form and shape of child care services is to prematurely cut off the normal experimental path that developmental professions have to be free to follow in order to find a more efficient and effective approach. Just stop and think for a moment, Mr. Speaker. The realities facing Canadian families in downtown Toronto or Vancouver are vastly different from those which face families in Labrador City, Berin's River or Fort Simpson. What possible standard appropriate for Toronto would make equal sense to a remote village without indoor plumbing? Implementing standards to ensure quality of care in Toronto may well leave large parts of the country without the capacity to provide day care services at all.

This is not to imply that such standards would result in good care in Toronto while other sections of the country without identical standards would be offering inferior services. What it means is that situations differ widely and call for a clustering of approaches which meet the needs of specific situations.

This brings me to what I mentioned earlier, the misunderstanding of the nature and objective of standards. Licensing standards, which are of utmost importance to safeguard the well-being of children, should not be confused with quality issues. Licensing represents the minimum standard that a Government thinks is permissible in order to operate equally. It is not the same thing as a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. It is only indirectly related to quality day care. Quality care comes from individuals and groups who do their very best to offer the most nurturing and favourable care possible.

The federal Government recognizes the need for experimentation and fuller information as to what constitutes quality care and through its child care initiative fund supports efforts in this direction. This Government's approach is to work with the provinces. We recognize that there are certain areas in standards that do relate directly to good care and insist that in order for the provinces to enter into the cost sharing provisions of this Act, the provinces must address in regulation the various areas. However, the provinces, being closer to the unique situation of parents in their region, can develop specific standards in each of these identified areas that best meet the situation in those areas. I might add that standards are a matter directly under provincial jurisdiction.

I would also stress that given the tremendous differences which exist across Canada, licensing standards are remarkably similar. Who among the Opposition would think that, sitting in