

Oral Questions

it is a bill for the people of Canada. We have shown the leadership.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Catterall: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. A woman's decision to seek an abortion is always a painful and agonizing one. Often it is based on the lack of support in society to value and support women and their children. Where is the legislation that establishes a sound family policy for Canada? Where is the legislation to give women access to counselling, to child care, to contraception, to training, to equal economic opportunities and to support, when they do have children? In fact, where is the legislation to allow women to choose to be mothers as well as to choose not to be?

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, I fully share the feeling that I think the hon. member expresses, that abortion should be a last resort and not a first resort. One of the challenges for all of us as parliamentarians is to ensure that we have an infrastructure in place that makes it possible for mothers to carry their children to term.

A number of those provisions are in place today in terms of assistance for counselling, for example, and in terms of assistance to people who are in need of financial assistance. When I speak in the debate later during the debate, I hope to be able to add to that and to announce other initiatives we may be taking in order to provide assistance in giving mothers the sort of help that they need to take positive decisions.

The hon. member asked specifically about the question of child care. Indeed, as was indicated by the Prime Minister, the government is determined to put in place a national child care program during this Parliament.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

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HEALTH CARE

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is either for the Minister of National Health and Welfare or for the Minister of Justice.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare certainly knows that the Canada Health Act requires provinces, in order to be eligible for funding coming from the federal

government, to meet five criteria. High amongst these are the questions of comprehensiveness and accessibility.

• (1430)

Both ministers also know that there are certain regions in this country which deny to women the right, confirmed by the Supreme Court, to have access to an abortion. With the proposed legislation that has been introduced, entailing as it does the possibility of Criminal Code sanctions, women in Canada are now concerned that this unfair access across Canada is going to become even more unfair.

Therefore, I want to ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare, why does he not use the authority that the federal government does have under the Canada Health Act to make sure that all Canadian women have fully equal access to their rights in this domain right across Canada?

Hon. Perrin Beatty (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the Canada Health Act in front of me. As the hon. member will know, in the preamble of the Canada Health Act, Parliament made it abundantly clear that the Canada Health Act was in no way designed to derogate the constitutional responsibilities of either level of government. The provisions of health services is constitutionally the primary responsibility of the provinces. In the Canada Health Act—

Mr. Broadbent: Primarily?

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman asked a question, and I am trying to answer it. As the hon. gentleman will know, in the Canada Health Act no mention is made whatsoever of any specific procedure having to be provided in a specific way. For example, there is no requirement under the Canada Health Act that procedures which could help to save lives such as procedures dealing with cancer or with heart disease must be provided in a specific way by any of the provinces.

Is the hon. gentleman proposing that the federal government should invade an area of provincial constitutional jurisdiction and specify that in the case of specific services, provinces must provide those services in a specific way or the federal government will refuse to fund medicare?