

Canada Child Care Act

It is imperative that we come up with a new approach in connection with day care services. Let us think in terms of a comprehensive overall plan and programs related to the issue of employment equity. The parliamentary task force which reviewed parental leave did emphasize the importance of the issue. The Government claims it is offering a variety of options to parents, but in fact there are only two: a tax deduction which can best be described as regressive, and a very small tax credit of \$200. As far as we are concerned, Mr. Speaker, several alternatives should be offered by day care services, including guaranteed day care facilities at the workplace. I will not belabour the point because I have no time, but I sincerely believe we need a good day care program, at least an option with respect to day care facilities at work.

Mr. Speaker, this is particularly important if, as I said earlier, a comprehensive program is put into place. The Liberal Party would allow a 100 per cent tax write-off on employer-sponsored programs as an incentive to set up child care facilities on the job. Mr. Speaker, we said so and we will do so because I am convinced that Canadians fully appreciate that it is fair, equitable and urgent to have reliable child care services at work.

• (1220)

[English]

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, I have spoken on this grouping before, therefore I do not believe I am entitled to speak on it again. I can answer the question of the Hon. Member.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Does the Minister have unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank Members. With regard to child care based in schools, the Hon. Member puts forward a long-standing position or discussion point that has been going on in various provinces and school authorities. I do not have any school board experience. The Hon. Member has 11 years experience on a school board, and I have 11 years experience in teaching, so perhaps there is some comparison.

Mr. Gauthier: Good employee-employer relations.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): We always had good employee-employer relations. Until I left there was neither conciliation nor arbitration, so I have some pride in that type of relationship.

The Hon. Member put forward two caveats with respect to the Bill, and I wish to address them. One is acceptable, and the other is not. That is why there needs to be some explanation. In respect to the location of the provision of service, school based, there is not a problem, particularly if one goes to the Province of Quebec.

Mr. Gauthier: Thirty thousand spaces.

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Exactly, and we want to preserve those spaces. In our negotiations with Québec we believe that the Bill covers that authority. Also from my discussions with the Québec Minister, I believe that that is understood. There is a difficulty, and I am going to get technical, just as the Hon. Member had to. He is well aware of Section 93 of the Constitution.

Education was not only considered as a very specific provincial right in constitutional form, it received a special constitutional clause. Canada has a long history, and we do not have to regale ourselves with our knowledge of that clause. If it is a service provided by a school authority, to wit, a school board as the Hon. Member was a member of, then the Bill is exclusionary. Therefore, it depends on which is the social service provider of the child care service. That becomes the critical point in the ability of the federal Government to flow money. I believe we have worked out an arrangement, not only with Quebec, but also with other provinces. I have no authority to extend the Bill into the service provider beyond the social services. That is where our disagreement would in fact come.

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) clarified that last point. It is something that we have been encouraging for some time, that different organizations have the ability to provide services, particularly those that are non-profit services. I want to comment on all three motions that are grouped for debate, Motion Nos. 18, 21, and 22.

In terms of targeting funds to provide an effort to meet the needs of children from low and modest income families, what has been so painfully clear by listening to the witnesses is that this will not accomplish that. The needs in our society are so great when it comes to meeting the needs of child care across the country that this approach will fall short.

I will not read it into the record, but I have a long list of all the organizations whose representatives appeared as witnesses at the committee. Every single one opposed the Bill. In the history of Parliament it is rather unique that every witness who appeared before the committee stated that the Government was wrong, that it should stop and not proceed. We are proceeding. I do not know why we go through this charade, if we are not going to listen to those who are expert in the field. That is why we welcome them in as witnesses to the committee hearings, in order that they can provide expert advice. When every expert in the country states that this is wrong, we should keep that in mind. However, I realize that this is not the time to do so, so I will set it aside for the moment and return to it later.

The Minister indicates that we want to provide child care for low and modest income families. Of course we do, Mr. Speaker, but this Bill will not accomplish it. It might make a dent into it, but it will not accomplish that.