

Canada Child Care Act

Some of the evidence that was addressed in committee indicates that based on past trends and the current funding arrangements, the number of licensed places would have increased by about 300,000 over the next seven years without the Government's Bill. The Government is saying that over the next seven years we will get 200,000 additional places. That is why I said that this Bill is a hoax. If your child happens to be No. 200,001, tough luck, you are out.

Moreover, by trumpeting this totally inadequate program, the Government is trying to make Canadian parents believe that it offers a solution to the problem. The reality is that it is no solution at all. The fact is that 70 per cent of our children who require child care services will still not have access to this program after seven years. We find that totally unacceptable. Canadian parents know that. Canadian families understand that. That is why, universally, they are condemning the Government for putting forward a totally inadequate plan for child care in Canada.

Part of the Government's so-called strategy for children is to increase the tax deduction for child care expenses. Tax deductions give the highest priority to those families in the highest income brackets. Under this legislation the family that happens to be in the top tax bracket and has two pre-school children will receive a total deduction of \$3,600 per year. A single mother will receive \$200. That is the Prime Minister's idea of fairness.

It is the same lopsided idea of fairness that has motivated the entire tax policy of the Government during the last four years. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and the total burden has been placed almost completely on the lower and middle income groups.

[Translation]

I think it is shameful that the Government of Canada has taken so long to realize it has a responsibility to ensure that in the distribution of joint programs to Canadians, the basic principle of equity is observed, wherever they may happen to reside. Establishing national standards would give Parliament and Canadian families the assurance that across this country, federally-financed child care services will not fall below acceptable levels.

Our basic criticism of this Bill is that it does not contain national standards nor provide for national accessibility. There is nothing in this Bill!

The Government's Bill is also disturbing in other respects. In addition to setting a ridiculously low ceiling on development of the network, the Tory program makes no provision for transferring to subsequent years any unused budget surplus for a given fiscal period.

This means that if for some reason, a province is unable to invest all of its federal funding within the prescribed time-frame, it will not have a chance to catch up during the following year. Here again, it is Canadian families who will be deprived of a service they really and urgently need.

• (1130)

[English]

I clearly indicated my position at the beginning of what I had to say this morning. I firmly believe that we must provide Canadians with a child care system offering a wide range of services of the highest possible quality. After having read this Bill, it is clear that families and community groups will not receive the support they need to develop a high quality child care system in this country.

We in the Liberal Party have committed ourselves to establishing a national child care foundation. This organization will provide groups with the funds needed to create and build the facilities which would best serve their needs. These facilities would then be eligible for cost-sharing grants to cover operating costs.

We on this side of the House are convinced that child care services in our native communities must be compatible with and not in conflict with their culture and traditions. Money put aside for native child care in this Bill is not only inadequate. It is discretionary and left to the whim of the Cabinet as to how and when to spend it.

We in the Liberal Party believe that any child care system that merits our approval must be based on two principles—on sharing the burden and on providing choices. Our proposal is that parents, the private sector and Government, provincial and federal, share the costs of the program. It will be a mixed program with more facilities and help for those who do not have access to those facilities, particularly in rural areas. It will give all parents a choice.

The establishment of a national child care program is essential. We must allow everyone, particularly women, to participate in the economic, social, cultural and democratic future of our country.

We must relieve parents in Canada of the agonizing choice between the children they love and the jobs they must have. We must invest today in young Canadians who will build the future of Canada. Any system should provide adequate support for low and middle income families. A percentage of this child care support should come from the conversion of the child tax deduction into a refundable tax credit. This support should allow an average family to pay for 50 per cent of child care costs, while giving low income families freer access to child care.

We must also encourage business, our professions, and private companies to provide quality child care support for their employees. They will immediately benefit in terms of improved quality of work, in terms of improved peace of mind and, indeed, in terms of minimized absences for family reasons. To promote this type of program, I have proposed a capital cost deduction which exceeds 100 per cent over five years.