

Adjournment Debate

What a noble government we have that snatches valuable and needed programs away from Canadian children, all in the name of saving money. The wealthy are the ones who benefit, and the weak and the poor are the ones who are chosen to be targeted.

It is not just children who are targeted. We have seen a clawback of old age pensions. We have seen a clawback of family allowances from parents, from mothers in particular. It makes one wonder as to just where the priorities of the government are when it decides that these are the people who should be made to suffer and bear the burden of the cuts that the government has inflicted over the past five years.

We have seen seniors targeted. We have seen mothers and children targeted. We have seen the sick targeted. Veterans were targeted this year, as well. Going after Canadian veterans was not a popular move. Indeed, it was a move even less popular than going after seniors' pensions some time ago. In the end it appears that the best target in the spectrum is Canadian children.

Right across the country we know the problems facing parents who must work to achieve a decent standard of living. It is extremely rare today that, for the "average" family of four, one income is enough to provide the necessities of life, let alone a few of the comforts that make life more bearable. It is a fact of life today that both parents in a two-parent family will have to work. Consequently, child care is needed for those families.

The other fact of life is the increasing number of single-parent families, the vast majority of whom are headed by women. Again, there is no question that if these women do not have gainful employment their choice is the welfare system. They do not want to make that choice—they want to work.

Over and over again we hear about people who do not really understand the average Canadian out there and who say that there is unemployment in Atlantic Canada, or unemployment among single parents, or unemployment in the north because "those people do not want to work". Those of us who sit in this House know that is not true. We know that Canadians want to work. They want to be productive workers, want to contribute to this society, want to raise their families and want to partake in all of the good things that should be the legacy of all Canadian citizens. If we do not provide an adequate

social service system for all Canadians, then we are all the poorer.

• (1800)

I spent five years on the board of the largest child care centre in Atlantic Canada. This centre has more than 12 units, or locations, across the city of Halifax. It deals with pre-school children and with children who need after-school and lunch-time programs. It deals with disabled children in that it has one of the very few units for disabled children, whether physically disabled or otherwise disabled. It has a French immersion program and it has enriched programs with specific dance and music programs, et cetera.

Lucky are the parents who can take advantage of this kind of program. If parents live in rural areas, they will probably not even have the access to the barest minimum standard child care program. It is just not good enough.

My hon. friend across the way from Etobicoke—Lakeshore, who I suspect is going to respond to me, will probably try to blame this matter on the Senate of Canada because it did not pass the bill before the election was called a long time ago. I merely state that it was a long time ago. We are into a new mandate. The children of Canada are waiting. I know that the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore has a heart. I would like to hear him say that this government has a heart and that this problem is one that is not going to be addressed in some airy-fairy future but now.

Mr. Patrick Boyer (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I rise to accept the invitation and I say without hesitation that the government has a heart and I would like to show how that is in fact the case. As she stated, the hon. member for Halifax has repeatedly raised in the House the question of the federal government's involvement with child care programs, national standards and so on. I think she quite rightly keeps this issue high on the public agenda.

In a preliminary way, I want to say that I think that this is not entirely a matter for the federal government. The closer that one is to the home, the community, I think of provincial governments, I think of unions, I think of companies, families, churches, many other organizations that are much closer to the children and the families as being more appropriately involved in this. Yet, of course, as we seek to have national standards, there is clearly an important role for the federal government.