

*Daycare*

We wanted preventive help for young children and families through the Department of National Health and Welfare, and the minister has done nothing about these recommendations. Through the same minister we wanted a national child care act and subsidies for comprehensive daycare. We want to extend job opportunities by providing training for youth through the Department of Employment and Immigration and the recognition of children's rights by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien).

I would like, Mr. Speaker, to concentrate particularly on those recommendations having to do with daycare and poverty as it affects young children. Let us look at some of the statistics which again prove how urgent the need is for good daycare across Canada. We know that 88 per cent of Canada's children are under the age of six. That is a large number of children, many of whom are born of adolescent mothers. If anyone needs adequate care, it is those children. Many mothers are in the labour force and are left with no choice but unlicensed child care arrangements. The state of baby-sitting is quite unreliable. Sometimes daycare services are not available or affordable, and children are actually being damaged. How tragic this is for mothers as well as for their children! Out of 531,000 children between the ages of two and six whose parents are working, only 15.7 per cent are enrolled in daycare. Out of 229,000 children under the age of two whose parents are working, only 3.8 per cent receive daycare. In my community in the province of British Columbia, there is no daycare service for children under the age of three, with the exception of private care. That means that a working mother must shop around in several places in an attempt to find satisfactory baby-sitting arrangements if she has children of different ages. There is no problem in proving the need for daycare.

● (1750)

Referring back to our special report on action for Canada's children, we recommended that there be a national childcare act and subsidies which would allow Canadians to have a comprehensive daycare program across the country. In many countries where family policy has been carefully and comprehensively planned, government-sponsored child care programs are provided as a matter of course. For instance, in Scandinavian countries, daycare is integrated with the school system. Every community and every family has available daycare for preschoolers which is very close to home, and it is good, high quality daycare. However, in Canada, while we call ourselves civilized, only 12 per cent of young children of working mothers were in government-approved child care programs in 1979. As I have said, over 600,000 children under the age of seven have no access to licensed care.

In addition, of course, there is a very great problem for children over the age of five, and this is also related to the field of daycare. We find that there are approximately one million latchkey children, as they say in the trade, who have no licensed care at all. These are children between the ages of six and 12 who come home to empty homes and must look after themselves or go on the streets, as they have no one who can

really provide the kind of supervision and care they need. That is another area of urgent need.

What should the federal government do about the problem? We feel, first of all, that there must be federal action to legislate a national child care act. We know that health and welfare services are largely under provincial jurisdiction; however, as the Commission on the International Year of the Child stated, it is also the responsibility of senior governments to ensure that all of Canada's children are provided with good care.

We feel that a national child care act, effected by agreement with the provinces, would spell out national standards for a broad range of child care services which would be available to families in all communities and provinces. Second, we would redefine eligibility for the Canada Assistance Plan. This was mentioned by other hon. members. Here again, the Canada Assistance Plan is in need of major revision so that more emphasis is placed on prevention of neglect. The Canada Assistance Plan usually provides money for services in cases of extreme neglect where children must be removed from their homes. We feel there should be greater emphasis on support services, such as daycare, and family services to go along with daycare, so that more emphasis is placed on prevention of neglect. These kinds of services should be available to a broader range of people.

Third, we would revise the Income Tax Act and provide an extended child care tax credit. I think that both men and women workers who need daycare for their children, regardless of income, should be able to deduct child care expenses from their income tax. This would help to support daycare centres financially. Fourth, we would provide start-up and capital funds for additional non-profit child care facilities.

I would like to stress that the essential funds should be provided for the non-profit daycare and child care facilities. It is extremely important to realize that because of free enterprise trends in our country, there is presently a movement toward commercial daycare centres into the field. There are many chain daycare centres which are trying to move in, just as the McDonald's hamburger chain has taken over our country. These commercial chains are moving up from the United States, particularly in this part of Canada, I understand, where they are providing daycare centres based on a profit motive. They provide no guarantee of adequate standards, and no guarantee that they will provide adequate staff. They exploit their child care workers and teachers by paying low salaries. These centres do not consider child development to be their main concern. We do not want daycare to be a profit-motivated, free enterprise business. We want it to be a very important and essential service, one which is part of our whole educational system for children.

Concerning the question of facilities, I would also like to mention that we feel the federal government should be providing much more in the way of start-up funds so that all communities, and particularly rural communities, can utilize some of the school classrooms which are now empty by converting them into daycare centres. This could be done with