

*Social Development Ministry*

I can go on down the list. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, for example, which has a direct impact upon the rural areas of Atlantic Canada and a direct impact on the social welfare of these rural areas, surely is another department which cannot operate in isolation. Other such departments are the Department of National Revenue, the Department of Finance, the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, Treasury Board, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and, of course, the Department of Veterans Affairs. So there is, and there must be, a very special relationship between social policy development and economic policy development, yet that fact was not spelled out nor indeed was it even alluded to by the minister when he introduced the resolution in the House today.

I am sorry that the Minister of National Health and Welfare is not in her place tonight because there are a number of studies and reports which she has tabled in the House on which no actions has been taken. I should like to know, for example, what the role of the new minister of state for social development will be with regard to the implementation of the recommendations in these reports. Let us think, for example, of the report of the task force on retirement income policy which was tabled in the House on April 21. Yet we have had no indication from the Minister of National Health and Welfare of what she proposed to do with the recommendations set out in the report of the task force. I tried, by way of a motion under Standing Order 43, to have the report referred by the House to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. At least this would have given the House an opportunity to be seized of the recommendations of this very important report. Unfortunately, the necessary consensus was not forthcoming. Is this report to go the way of all reports?

I can go back in memory to a number of reports, which have a direct impact on social policy, which have been commissioned by the House and the other place, such as, for example, the Senate report of 1972 having to do with retirement policy. What has become of the recommendations in that report? As I recall it, the report was the result of some very substantial and intensive hearings held by the Senate committee. It was an excellent report which I would commend to the minister of state for social development.

I come to another report which was tabled in the House by the Minister of National Health and Welfare on May 30, namely, the report of the Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child. That report has some very important recommendations. We were given to understand that this report would at least be the subject of a reference by the government to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. Indeed, the agenda worked out by the standing committee makes provision for the committee to take up the report. Quite frankly, we are supposed, according to that schedule, to be dealing with that report tomorrow. Yet, of course, we cannot deal with it in the absence of a reference by the House to the standing committee.

One of the important recommendations in that report is recommendation 14.4 which reads:

The federal government establish a responsibility centre within the most appropriate federal structure to examine and initiate legislation and departmental policies affecting children. This centre should have a co-ordinator with deputy minister status and a policy link with cabinet.

Is the report of this very important commission to be the responsibility of the Minister of National Health and Welfare, or is it to be part of the ongoing co-ordinating responsibilities of the new minister of state for social development?

● (2020)

Speaking of the report of the Commission for the International Year of the Child reminds me of an initiative I took in the Thirtieth Parliament. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Minister of State for Social Development will recall that, because he was a member of the committee at the time. It was a bill dealing with a bill of rights for children. It was referred to committee. Although we had exhaustive hearings and heard many witnesses, events overtook us and the report of the committee died with the Thirtieth Parliament. It is interesting to reflect upon the recommendations of the draft report. I underline the fact that it was only a draft report; it was never accepted by the committee. I should like to refer to recommendation No. 1 of the draft report which reads as follows:

The federal Minister of Justice should examine the Criminal Code, the Juvenile Delinquents Act and the Divorce Act, as well as all other federal legislation affecting children, to ensure that their rights and entitlements are clearly enunciated. Where his study reveals this not to be the case, he should introduce remedial legislation in Parliament to ensure that this goal is attained.

It goes on to recommend that the minister meet with his provincial counterparts to discuss areas of overlapping jurisdiction.

Recommendation No. 3 reads as follows:

The federal government should convene a federal-provincial conference on "Children's Rights in a Changing Society" before the end of the International Year of the Child.

The International Year of the Child is gone; it is behind us. All we have now are the recommendations contained in the report of the task force. I want to place special emphasis on this because I believe it to be very important. Interestingly enough, in his speech today the minister made reference to the fact that we have more poor children in Canada today than ten years ago. That speaks to a problem of income distribution. I realize the government has already brought in the child tax credit plan, which I think is an excellent program. In terms of addressing the problem of poor families, the child tax credit program tends to benefit more the middle-income families in Canada. Quite frankly, that is something about which we should be thinking in this Parliament.

Before this seven-hour debate concludes—and it is only a seven-hour debate—I hope the Minister of National Health and Welfare will be in her place in the House so that she can address some of these questions.

I have referred to two or three studies which have been made on social policies. There is a whole array of studies commissioned by the House, the government and the other place over the past decade. They have been pigeon-holed and