

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CHILD CARE SERVICES

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Human Resources Development.

It seems that it is the minister's intention to release a national child care strategy within a few weeks. Here again, this is a reform that is ready but will not be made public until after the referendum.

Are we to understand that the reason for the minister's refusal to make his strategy on child care services known before the referendum is to avoid having to confirm his intention of imposing national standards on Quebec in an area of provincial jurisdiction?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the hon. member for Mercier is in a bit of a time warp in a number of respects. We have already indicated to the provinces and to other partners that we are prepared to cost share child care. We had a major meeting of deputies almost a year ago at which we offered to pay 50 per cent of the cost of new spaces.

Fortunately a very important initiative was taken up by the First Nations people. We are almost ready to conclude an agreement with the First Nations Assembly for 6,000 new child care spaces sponsored by our First Nations people. We hope to have that concluded in a couple of weeks.

Because certain provinces are now engaging in restricting child care, I simply wrote to the Ontario minister to remind him the federal government is willing to be a partner in sharing the cost of child care so these spaces do not have to be closed.

I hope the hon. member will help carry that message because child care is very important to many Canadians.

[Translation]

Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is quick with his irony, but he has not answered the question.

Is he committed to not making Quebec's compliance with federal standards a condition for funding of child care services?

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we made it very clear that we are prepared to provide cost sharing over a five-year period and that it is the jurisdiction of the provinces to decide how that money

would be allocated. I am simply waiting for a response. I am not trying to be quick witted but it takes effort when dealing with Bloc questions.

The provinces make these decisions. I want to ensure we can provide, as we do in many other areas, a national response so we can share and pool our resources to ensure areas with fewer resources are considered. That is why I took some interest today in the minister of employment in Quebec when she talked about totally fragmenting the national unemployment insurance service for Quebecers. It would put at risk thousands upon thousands of Quebec workers who would no longer have access to a national unemployment insurance program.

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● (1440)

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the health minister does not want U.S. style health care and that is good; neither do we. However, we want what Canadians want, choice in health care as in Sweden, Denmark, England and many other countries. Those countries all respect choice.

Why will the health minister not offer Canadians choice beyond medicare?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have the best choice of any country in the world. They get the best services no matter who they are, no matter where they live, whether or not they have money.

It is determined by the degree or the severity of their needs. That is the way it should be. That is the way Canadians want it.

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, there are only three countries in the world that do not offer choice beyond medicare: North Korea, Cuba and now Canada, thanks to the health minister.

Will the minister listen to the appeal of Canadians for choices beyond cutbacks, for choices beyond waiting lists, for choices beyond line up, shut up and check out?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member exaggerates when he tries to compare us with Cuba and such countries when we have the best medicare system in the world.

The hon. member would like us to give people a choice. Is it something like the choice to buy a box seat at the SkyDome? Having an illness is not like going to a baseball game.

We believe we need the best for people as they need it, and the very best is what we have had in Canada. We will continue to support that.