

*Private Members' Business*

Authority used to be categorical with parents giving the orders and the children listening. If the UN had its way, family matters might be decided democratically. I do not know how but that is what the UN suggests.

However since any undemocratic organization is no longer considered to be legitimate in the eyes of the state, this would give the state the rationale to intervene in what it would call an authoritarian family or traditional family. The idea of a democratic family therefore reduces the authority of parents and fundamentally alters the security of the family in relation to the state.

Just as the authority within the family is being dispersed, the definition of family seems to be broadening. Listen to what Hillary Clinton said last year, ironically on Mother's Day. Talking about the family she said: "If it ever did, the traditional family no longer does consist of two parents, two children, a dog, a house with a white picket fence and a stationwagon in the driveway".

The First Lady went on to recommend what she called the extended family to fill the void as traditional families dwindle and to look out for friends, neighbours and fellow citizens as they would members of their own families. She concluded by saying: "When the traditional bonds of family are too often frayed we all need to appreciate that in a very real sense we have all become an extended family".

What the First Lady really said is that the traditional family, the defining boundary between the mom, the dad and the kids is now disappearing and a continuum of other relationships should be added to it. Here a conflict emerges. At the same time as societal definitions broaden, for financial reasons the ability of all governments to grant benefits is being severely restricted. In order to apportion benefits in some rational manner the logical answer for government is to narrow its definitions of who may receive them. Therefore governments should be looking to restrict their definitions, not broaden them.

I am not pronouncing a judgment on whether or not homosexuals should live together. However, I am saying that for the purposes of government benefits society cannot afford to broaden its definitions to apportion benefits to many more new groups, including homosexual unions.

The member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve may argue that he does not want benefits; he simply wants rights, specifically the right to be recognized as a married couple. He might say that a marriage ceremony does not cost anything but in Canada rights are the door to entitlements.

The concept of entitlement is a very powerful thing in Canadian law. If a person is defined as someone who is eligible to receive unemployment insurance for example that benefit becomes a right, an entitlement and no one can deny it to that person. Marriage brings with it entitlements as well. Once the right has been given there would be no way to hold back the benefits.

There is another reason to decide against this motion. The redefinition of the family would open up a Pandora's box of definition problems for other groups. There is no logical stopping point between a homosexual couple and any number of other unions. If a homosexual couple wants to be a family why not roommates or people living together in group homes? Why not close friends living under different roofs? By surrendering the traditional definition of the family, government would surrender its ability to choose who receives benefits and who does not.

• (1125)

I want to remind members that in practice the concept of the nuclear family is really quite static. As late as 1949 anthropologist George Murdock completed a study of 250 societies worldwide and said: "The nuclear family is a universal human social grouping either as the sole prevailing form of the family or as the basic unit from which more complex familial forms are compounded. It exists as a distinct and strongly functional group in every known society".

A Stats Canada study released last year found that in 1941, well prior to that study, 88 per cent of Canadians were living in nuclear families. In 1991, 87 per cent of Canadians were still living in this husband and wife model. In other words the number of people living in nuclear families or in husband and wife with children families has remained constant for 50 years.

Therefore attitudes toward the nuclear family and real life practice are not changing as much as we are led to believe by activists who manipulate or would like to manipulate members of Parliament and the media. Members should not be stampeded toward redefinition by media criticism and noisy pressure group tactics.

It seems to me that interest groups exercising profound political pressure over several decades have managed to slice up the government benefits pie in ways that are advantageous to them and disadvantageous to nuclear families when the nuclear family is one of the foundations of our society and needs to be strengthened, not weakened.

For this reason I introduced a private member's bill called the auditor general for the family act. This bill would establish a small body with a limit of 20 employees to advise Parliament about the ways it could support and strengthen the nuclear family in Canada. It is interesting that later this week we will be debating in the House the need for the country to have an environmental auditor yet we do not have the same sort of thing advocating on behalf of the nuclear family.