

Canada Child Care Act

In Alberta, for instance, we have an abundance of day care spaces, a matter that comes under provincial jurisdiction. The federal Government must provide help across Canada, in poor regions that are economically unable to set up services. Transfer payments must therefore be made by the Federal Government. That is how we should consider this Bill. The legislation must be balanced and must provide help in those marginal cases where the mother must stay home because she has several children. Tax credits must be added for those families.

Those are the comments I wanted to make. I wanted also to congratulate the Hon. Member for Louis-Hébert on her excellent speech.

[English]

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate having this opportunity to say a few words on this important issue of child care. I want to begin my remarks by recalling an incident in Kamloops during the 1984 election campaign when the now Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) visited Kamloops. He went on at some length at a public meeting about all of the wonderful initiatives that his Government would take in providing adequate child care to meet the needs of Canadian families and that it was one of his top priorities.

Here we are on the eve of an election call, four years later, and we are now just beginning to talk about legislation. But, this legislation before us is seriously and fundamentally flawed. It is actually a step backward in time. What the Government is providing is a complete and total smoke-screen because what we will get as a result of this so-called child care Bill is something worse than what we have today. Let me outline why I say that.

First I want to prick one big balloon myth that has been floating around. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) has said on many occasions that this package will add \$6.4 billion over seven years to provide child care in Canada.

● (1640)

I want to quote from Marjorie Nichols column in *The Ottawa Citizen* of August 17, 1988. If there is one journalist we all hold in high esteem, it is Marjorie Nichols. If there is one journalist whose work appears in newspapers across the country, who appears on national television regularly as a commentator on the Government's work, it is Marjorie Nichols. She says that the Bill before the Commons would provide for about \$2.6 billion in new federal funds for child care. Not \$6.4 billion but \$2.6 billion. I just wanted to put on the record very clearly that the Minister of National Health and Welfare is not doing what he says he is doing. I would not say he is intentionally misleading Canadians, but I would come awfully close to saying that.

What is the situation? We have a crisis in child care and there is no other word for it. There is not a Member of

Parliament who does not have a long list of experiences with constituents who are forced to work and, therefore, know the tragedy of having to leave their young children with baby-sitters and so on. They get up at seven o'clock in the morning only to find their baby-sitter has gone on holidays and forgot to tell them, or is sick and cannot take their young children and they have to find someone else before they can go to work. There are all sorts of absolute horror stories that people are forced to contend with because the Government has not acted.

I have two letters here from constituents, one of which says:

I am a single mother with two children living in Dallas.

That is a suburb of Kamloops, not Dallas, Texas. It says:

I have a part-time job working about 30 hours a week and make only \$1100 a month, yet I am required to pay out \$610 a month for child care for my children. It is good care for my children and I applaud the care givers, but, Mr. Riis, I can hardly afford it. How can I continue? Have you any advice?

I will not read her name because I have not asked her permission to read the letter into the record, but she is a constituent. The other letter says:

My husband and I own a small cattle ranch and my husband is forced to work out at Tumbler Ridge—

I should say that Tumbler Ridge is a coal mining area in British Columbia which is obviously away from their ranch. It says:

—due to the bank problems that you are well aware of. The problem is that while I have managed to get a part-time job, there are no daycare facilities for our three children all under the age of seven. I hope in your attempts to get the Government to introduce more support for child care that you remember those of us who live in rural areas or small towns who desperately need daycare if we are to survive.

These letters are typical of the dozens of letters that constituents write to us vividly detailing the crisis they face on a personal basis. This has mushroomed into a national crisis. If you look at the situation in 1988, according to the national day care information centre there are 2,103,450 children whose parents work or study full time. How many licensed child care spaces are there in Canada? Only 243,000. In other words, less than 12 per cent of those who may need licensed child care spaces have them available. The province I am proud to represent from the constituency of Kamloops—Shuswap requires more than 150,000 day care spaces just to meet present needs. There are only 243,000 all across Canada. That is why I call it a crisis. Adequate child care spaces in Canada simply do not exist.

When we talk about child care we are going beyond simply day care spaces. We all recognize that significant numbers of day care spaces are available but there are also other forms of child care, including family home child care which we must develop. We must develop before and after school care. We must develop neighbourhood drop-in child care centres for young children and their parents. We see the development of essentially a resource centre to help people raising their children. We need 24 hour child care for those who have to work shifts or leave home for one or two days a week because of their jobs, such as selling and so on. We need weekend care