

Private Members' Business

From a health perspective I wish to lay before you some disturbing facts which reaffirm my desire, as well as that of my colleague, for the Government of Canada to initiate leadership on these very important issues.

In 1977, the number of hospital admissions of native people for infections and parasitic diseases was about seven times higher than the national average. The mortality rate among native infants was two times higher for natives and four times higher for Inuit than the national rate. The mortality rate was almost three times higher for native children ages one to four years than for non-native children.

A glaring fact which ought to be shared with members of Parliament is that in 1981, 50 per cent of native people were in the labour force and the average income was two-thirds less for natives than for non-natives.

According to an article published in 1989 entitled "Nutritional problems of native Canadians, mothers and children", fluoride is not present in the water supply of most native communities and must be given to combat dental problems which are rampant in some areas throughout their communities.

I could go on and on with a litany of facts which would support my thesis, namely, that there are major and serious social and economic problems being faced by aboriginal people in Canada, so much so that those particular problems demand an immediate and effective comprehensive response by the Government of Canada. It is not sufficient at all for the Government of Canada to say that because of budgetary restrictions, because of the fact that it has linkages to provincial jurisdictions, the Canadian government is somewhat paralysed in providing a comprehensive response. If that is what the government of the day holds, it seems to me that it has fallen by the wayside in terms of living up to its responsibilities in meeting the needs of Canadian people and, in particular, our aboriginal people.

Special initiatives to combat the educational problems with regard to aboriginal youth ought to be a priority for any government. It ought to be a priority for every government; federally, provincially, and, yes, even our own municipalities in the respective areas of this country must bear some of the responsibility. What we hear are responses from the Government of Canada which would

suggest that there may be a problem and, if there is a problem, we do not have the money nor, more important, do we have the will to ascertain the answers to provide a comprehensive response.

So there is, first, the lack of financial resources. Second and more important, there is the lack of political will to evolve a comprehensive response to the many facts I have laid before the House on this occasion and previous occasions, particularly during debate with regard to the child care situation in this country. It is irresponsible of the Government of Canada not to exercise its jurisdiction, its legislative authority and its political will to try to come up with a comprehensive response.

There has been a clear example of this broken promise and lack of leadership with regard to child care. There are many native communities throughout this country that desperately require new spaces in order that native children be given high quality child care. The government's response is that it was to provide upwards of \$60 million to try to address that particular situation. However, in April of last year the Minister of Finance, aided and abetted by the Minister for National Health and Welfare, axed \$60 million from their budget.

I have travelled to the native communities across this country, albeit not as often as I have wished to. In fact, I have been in my colleague's constituency. In those communities you see the need. This is not a need just written on paper. It is not a need that is theorized, if you will, by the academics at Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax, or the University of Toronto, or in Winnipeg, Calgary, or Vancouver. This is a real need, a people need. The response is: "We have no money. There is no political will. We don't have a response. I'm sorry."

These kinds of answers emanating from the front benches across the way leave Canadians with very few options. One immediate effect of not addressing the real social and economic problems of our aboriginal youth is for people to lose hope but, more important, to lose hope and faith in those institutions that they have supported over the years.

Are we paralyzed as a Parliament? Are we so ineffectual in terms of bringing the largesse of the treasury benches of the Government of Canada to the particular needs of aboriginal youth? Are we so concerned with our own personal pay cheques, our own personal well-being, that we cannot see beyond our own borders to other