

INCOME TAX ACT AND RELATED ACTS

TABLING OF TECHNICAL NOTES

Hon. Barbara McDougall (Minister of State (Finance)): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 47(2), I wish to table, in both official languages, copies of the technical notes to the Bill amending the Income Tax Act and related statutes.

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SOCIAL AFFAIRS

ESTABLISHMENT OF TASK FORCE ON CHILD CARE—STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF NATIONAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the House this afternoon on the establishment of a parliamentary task force on child care. The necessary technical motions will be moved at the appropriate time by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Hnatyshyn).

The Government formally announced its intention to establish such a parliamentary task force in the Speech from the Throne last November. Over past months, the Government has given very serious thought to the role of this task force and the complex questions which it will be asked to confront. I am pleased that we are now in a position to proceed with this inquiry into the issue of child care and the changing needs of Canadian families.

In general, the purpose of the parliamentary task force is to seek public input and to make recommendations on the issue of child care as it relates to families in Canada. This inquiry is a vital step in the development of directions for child care, because currently there is limited consensus on this issue among Canadians. It is generally recognized that the changing circumstances of many families, including the growing number of two-earner couples and the increased incidence of single mothers, has raised concerns about the issue of child care and the appropriate role of the federal Government in this area. However, there is no agreement among Canadians about what should be done to meet the changing needs of families and children with respect to child care. Accordingly, this parliamentary inquiry will offer an important opportunity to examine the issue of child care with a view to pursuing a national consensus.

As we will see from the terms of reference, we are asking the inquiry to look at the care of children in a broad context, which includes consideration of the child care requirements of all children, not just children with working parents. Thus, the members of the task force and other participants are encouraged to go beyond the narrow issues which are frequently associated with daycare services. Rather than focusing the inquiry on an analysis of existing child care or related programs, the terms of reference invite participants to undertake a fresh review of the questions associated with child care and to put forward innovative alternatives for reform.

Statements by Ministers

We are launching this task force in response to public concerns that the needs of families and children are changing. These concerns and the pressures for reform are frequently summarized under the three themes of affordability, quality and availability.

In addressing concerns with respect to affordability, I would hope the task force can highlight and resolve some of the basic questions about the costs of child care and how these costs should be shared, for example, among families, employers, Governments and other groups that have an interest and responsibility in respect of child care. Also, there is the important question of whether the future direction of child care is to be developed as an issue concerning the children of working women only, or whether it should also relate to the children of mothers who forgo employment earnings to provide full-time parental care for their young children.

The second theme, that of quality in child care, highlights concerns about the well-being and protection of children in non-parental arrangements. In particular, there is the difficult issue of what constitutes quality care in general and in the case of a particular child. Also, there is the question of whether or not it is appropriate or desirable for Government initiatives to encourage the use of one type of care over other types of arrangements.

Third, the theme of availability focuses attention on the factors affecting the ability of the supply of child care services to meet demand. To some, this theme highlights concerns about the situation of latchkey children and the special problems of families in rural locations. It also raises questions about the Government's role in expanding the supply of child care services directly, relative to other sources of supply, including employers and community groups.

In general, the consideration of these and other concerns and questions are central to the development of an agreement or a consensus on future directions and alternatives for a child care policy.

• (1530)

Clearly, the task force on child care is being asked to consider a very complex issue. Therefore, we have given careful consideration to the details contained in its terms of reference. As you may note, Mr. Speaker, the inquiry has been asked to develop its conclusions and recommendations within a broad framework with particular reference to a variety of factors such as the preferences of parents in providing care for their children and the economic implications of child care.

The task force has also been instructed to address the relationship between child care needs and the special needs and requirements of various families. These special circumstances include such factors as marital status, disability and the economic position of the family. However, the terms of reference are sufficiently flexible to enable the members of the task force to add other criteria which they determine to be relevant to the issue of child care.

In addition, the members of the task force are specifically instructed to take account of the shared interest and responsi-