

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for a very moving speech. His reference to real life situations in his riding was what made it such a strong appeal.

• (1710)

I would like to refer to just one situation that I had in my riding concerning children of refugee claimants which, of course, is a federal jurisdiction. A Polish-Canadian doctor came to me a couple of weeks ago about a group of children who had been here for over two, sometimes three, years, and whose families were going once again to be uprooted and sent back to Poland because they did not pass the test now. They did it when they first came but now the rules have changed and they will have to go back to more poverty and insecurity in Poland.

We talked about this. There are many other children from other ethnic groups who are here in the same situation. In fact across Canada there are many thousands of children of refugee claimants who are in that backlog.

In this year when there has been a UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Prime Minister headed a summit on children, does the member think it would be a good idea, very just and humanitarian for this government to have a waiver for all those children and their families, thus saving millions of dollars as well, which might go into school food programs or something similar for poor children who have come through trauma.

Mr. Breugh: Mr. Speaker, I agree heartily with the idea that children should not become the object of some process that harms them. I am very grateful that when my ancestors came to this country, there was nowhere the immigration system that they have now or there is absolutely no chance I would be here.

When you identify for example a major problem, like the immigration problems we have now, there is a need to move dramatically on a large scale with things like an amnesty for children to alleviate all the illnesses in the system. Surely none of us would argue the point that a child should not become yet another problem to deal with.

The member and I have discussed this. It is quite possible that the ruling in the end will be somehow that the children will be allowed to stay and the parents will

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be sent back to Poland, or probably that the parents will be allowed to come here if the children go back home.

All we ask for in all of this is just a simple little bit of common sense that where you have identified the problem, when it is children who are affected most dramatically, surely a straightforward answer, if not necessarily a simple answer is what is required.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated.

Mr. Boudria: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I wonder if I could ask the consent of the House that for this next round, the round we are starting now, in other words the next 20 minutes, that it be shared by two Liberal speakers in succession, rather than one for 20 minutes. It would accommodate us as we have two members who would like to share the next round.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Black: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The hon. member for Winnipeg North has the floor.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, do we have consent?

Mr. Speaker, child poverty is a major public health problem in Canada. We have one million infants and children who live below the poverty line. They are without adequate care, food, clothing and shelter. Their numbers are nearly equal to the total population of Manitoba. Each poor child is accompanied by the spectre of poor health, which follows him or her from the womb to the grave. That is what poverty means to the health of a poor child—the topic that I shall focus on during this debate.

With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that today is the 12th birthday of our youngest son, Christopher Justin. C.J., as we fondly call him, understands that I will miss this special day for him in Winnipeg. He understands the seriousness of the issue we are debating here today, and he understands that as a paediatrician and our party's critic for national health and welfare, I could and I should add a new dimension and perspective to the debate.

This member has lived through poverty during childhood and schooling. I know what it was to be poor. Hence I am pleased to debate this issue. I am pleased to be part of the Liberal Party of Canada, which is privileged today to do its duty on behalf of all poor Canadian