

*Canada Child Care Act*

Laval University should be identical to that at the University of British Columbia and that admission criteria, competence of staff and student assistance programs should be the same at both institutions.

• (1620)

Madam Speaker, these assumptions are of course false. Like many others, the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis) said indignantly in his speech last Wednesday that we would have a very uneven system because different provinces would have different standards of child care. In an area that falls purely under provincial jurisdiction, there may be variations from province to province to reflect the different needs that exist across the country.

Today, we have this divergence in health care because certain services which are fully insured in some provinces are only partially insured in other provinces or not at all. We have the same kind of situation in social assistance, because different provinces provide different rates of assistance to different categories of recipients. The same applies to post-secondary education, where admission criteria and student assistance programs vary from province to province and from university to university.

In fact, even if that may surprise the Hon. Member and others who share his views, there is no standard for establishing these programs. None are recommended for this Bill, any more than standards exist in legislation authorizing federal financial assistance to programs that fall under provincial jurisdiction.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, when witnesses for the FTQ informed the New Democratic spokesperson for the Bill at the hearings of the legislative committee that standards should be left entirely up to the provinces, she approved that position, stating that the NDP only wanted the Bill to set national objectives.

Madam Speaker, I may add that the next day, the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell) did a clause-by-clause analysis, proposing a series of amendments regarding so-called national objectives, most of which were just program standards, under a different name. Nevertheless, she at least recognized in principle that those who claim that imposing uniform minimum standards regarding child/staff ratios, program contents and personnel qualifications on every province is not a violation of provincial jurisdiction are dreaming!

Far from giving up our responsibility to encourage the provinces to improve their minimum standards for accredited child care facilities, this legislation goes further than any comparable previous Bill, because it asks the provinces to set program standards in seven specific areas, to make these standards public and to enforce them.

There is no such requirement in the Canada Health Act, in the Canada Assistance Plan or in the legislation governing contributions for post-secondary education.

The Hon. Member for Vancouver East asked about national standards in the Canada Health Act.

Since most provinces approve of the Meech Lake Agreement, which explicitly authorizes the federal Government to set national standards for new cost-sharing programs that the provinces must respect in order to receive federal funds if they opt out of such programs, would such objectives have been legitimate in the Bill?

There are two answers to this question, Madam Speaker? First, these national objectives are in the Bill. They are stated in part in the preamble and in the requirements to set, make public and enforce program standards in some areas with which the provinces must comply to be entitled to the cost-sharing provided for in this Bill.

Second, what the NDP suggested in committee and at the report stage as national objectives were, in fact, disguised attempts at imposing detailed program implementation standards. For example, the Canada Health Act mentions accessibility as a national objective, meaning that fees cannot be charged for insured services. As the NDP recognizes that fees for child care centres should continue for an unspecified period, even according to its suggestions, it would be ridiculous to establish such an objective and to bind the financing provided in the legislation to that kind of objective. That is what the NDP is suggesting we do in its definition of affordability, among other national objectives. As well, its definition of accessibility seems to demand that provinces establish a child care center in all communities so that parents never have to wait for a space.

A similar objective in the Canada Health Act would mean that a province should provide hospitals, doctors and nurses in all communities and suppress waiting lists for surgery. The NDP definition of quality would demand that provinces provide services equivalent to those provided in most other provinces and conform to the most recent child care standards. Detailed implementation standards would be dictated under the guise of national objectives.

All I can say, Madam Speaker, is that those propositions are dishonest or that those who make them are completely ignorant of their impact. That is most annoying. Even if there was no constitutional aspect involved, would it be logical to have, for example, a standardized ratio of three children per care giver when we know that this standard could be easily met in Quebec City or in Toronto but would prevent the creation of a licensed day care facility in a small village or in an unorganized rural community? That is only one of the realities we are faced with when we think of national standards.

Madam Speaker, I would like to conclude my remarks by saying that, in the rhetoric he served us last Wednesday, the NDP House Leader referred to a strictly federal program, the