

chosen the preferred child raising option of Canadians and yet pay higher taxes on their earnings because of it.

There is a real need to entrench within government policy and give full recognition to the importance of family in our society. The issue of child poverty is rooted not in the issue of women's rights or even of children's rights but in the issue of the strength of families.

Government policies can actually detract from the importance of family role. It is refreshing to see a slight reversal of this trend from the government side. Perhaps this will send a loud message with a purpose to give the family back its prominence and priority within our society, and give them back the freedom to choose.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Pierrette Ringuette-Maltais (Madawaska—Victoria):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to support the hon. member's bill. I may add I am not so naive as to expect the Canadian tax system and the general public to support this kind of bill. However, before we have legislation supported by the majority of the people and the members in this House, we must first have some time for discussion.

In fact, this bill gives us an opportunity to look at our tax policies and consider how the Act could be amended. It may well be that at Finance or National Revenue, this kind of legislation is seen as a considerable loss of revenue. I must point out that this would only be in the short term. If we look at pension funds in Canada and the Canada Pension Plan, all the supplements paid to the spouse who was unable to take advantage of a private pension plan are so many expenditures for the Canadian government.

I think we should take a much broader view of this bill. We can take the short term view but we can also take the longer view, and I am thinking of the economic spin-offs.

As the hon. member mentioned earlier, I also think this bill raises the whole issue of recognizing the value of work done in the home, work that has a social value in Canada.

• (1820)

At some point we can put a price tag on these social values. Our tax system should be able to recognize that cost, although personally, I think that women or men who decide to stay home do so as a matter of choice or personal emancipation. There are people who function extremely well in the home, although unfortunately, I am not one of them. I notice my colleagues are smiling, but I think we must recognize the value of work done in the home.

I would even say that in this initial bill, perhaps we should have considered all children, not only children of pre-school age who are still at home. In the current context, all levels of

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government and Canadian society as a whole urge children to take some responsibility for caring for their parents and grandparents.

When care is given to a child, a teenager, an adult or an elderly person, there is an intrinsic social value that should be recognized. I think it is the right time to start this debate on the value of the Canadian family and the individual. I think it is the right time and also the right week, since this is National Family Week. My family includes my parents, grandparents, children, spouse and in-laws. They will be glad to hear that!

I think it is high time, when we are talking about updating all our social programs in this country as well as a review of our tax system in the short, medium and long term, I think it is high time to get this debate going. I may be naive, but I believe that Canadians across the country will be very pleased to have an opportunity to discuss this value and to ensure perhaps that we can create a very just society, one that will be even more just and progressive than it is now.

[English]

**Mr. David Walker (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I would like to thank the hon. member for Mississauga South for raising these issues through Bill C-256.

While I appreciate the intent of the bill I have some serious concerns with the proposal. I would like to bring to the attention of the House and the very many members who are interested in this three concerns.

First, I believe it would reduce tax revenues at a time when our fiscal position precludes any erosion of the tax base. Second, I do not think the proposed amendments to the Income Tax Act will deliver the anticipated benefits. Third, this bill could have negative consequences that may not have been anticipated by its sponsor.

Parents among us will know that raising young children entails unique expense. I personally fit into one of those families where one parent works and we have two young children at home. Expenses can put significant pressure on a family's income. Fortunately these expenses are recognized by the Income Tax Act. For example the child tax benefit provides financial assistance for low and middle income families with children. A supplement of \$213 is provided for each dependent child under seven.

This measure is directed particularly to those families where one spouse stays at home to care for preschool children. Tax relief is also provided to working families through the child care expense deduction which helps to offset day care costs. Recognizing that the cost of child care is higher for preschool children the limits on the deduction are higher for children below age seven.