

Adjournment Debate

subsidize the real cost of child care by working hard for low salaries. Varied policies, funding and distribution services across the country have created a situation where some Canadian families have access to child care services and some do not. The care and well-being of our children is a social as well as individual responsibility. Women must not be penalized for maternity.

During the election campaign, which brought the present Government to power, the now Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) promised cash dollars for child care. He said:

We view the provision of day care as requiring leadership in funds from the federal government because proper day care facilities are an instrument for economic advancement and fairness for women.

The need for child care services has been adequately proven and shown by the Prime Minister during the election campaign, by women themselves, by children and indeed by numerous studies conducted at the federal level. As a very minimum, the Government has an obligation to provide funding now for child care services to show a good indication of faith in Canada's future and Canada's children.

Mr. Gerry Weiner (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I share the Hon. Member's concern for child care and the need for adequate child care facilities. I also realize that it will take public dollars to develop and support those child care facilities.

The Hon. Member must recognize that social justice is an important aim of a group of people who took over the management of this country in September, 1984. Of course, we had a few things to put in place before we could get to all of the things we wanted to do. Those had to do with putting people back to work and with giving people a sense of well-being. We do have four or five years to establish all of the priorities that we talked about in the summer of 1984.

As a Member of this Government, finding workable, affordable solutions to the present child care crisis has been and remains a priority objective. It is clear that public dollars will have to be used to develop and support a system of child care adequate to the needs of children and their families. The

inability to pay for adequate, suitable, quality care severely restricts, in fact one could say removes parents' choices and unnecessarily exposes children to risk.

When we realize that only 9 per cent of children who need supervised care are in licensed care, we must accept that their families are not choosing the care they prefer, but finding what they can and, in most cases, are using inadequately supervised care. In other words, families must make tremendous sacrifices and may still find themselves in unsuitable and costly arrangements.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the provinces have the major responsibility for regulating and delivering child care. I am convinced that to improve the over-all situation, co-operative action is required. The Katie Cooke task force, in a comprehensive research document which recommends short, medium and long-term options, proposes a system comparable to the education system, financed solely from public funds coming from the federal and provincial Governments. How we will achieve this is very much in the hands of the parliamentary task force on child care which is seeking public input on the issue, the federal-provincial health and social services ministers and the finance ministers.

The Government is committed and convinced that it is necessary to take steps to improve the child care system. However, we must also strike a balance between our fiscal priorities and our social policy responsibilities. Whatever the direction taken, we will ill serve women, children, families and society if we fail to make significant improvements to the current situation.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 o'clock p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 3(1).

The House adjourned at 6.30 p.m.