

Family Allowances Act

York East (Mr. Redway) on his calm, cool and reasoned explanation of this Bill. With the debate we have had in this House over the last few days and some of the misinformation given, it is nice to hear someone tell it like it is. I think it is safe to say that the Hon. Member has convinced me to vote in favour of this Bill.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Schellenberg: The Hon. Member talks about his wish to increase the child tax credit measure. Should our Government not consider perhaps removing the child tax benefit for those making in excess of, say, \$50,000 a year so we may continue this reverse Robin Hood method to provide more in the form of child tax credit?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member may want to answer that question behind the curtain. I would like to recognize the next speaker. Questions and comments are now terminated. The Hon. Member for Thunder Bay-Atikokan (Mr. Angus).

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with two matters relating to Bill C-70, an Act to amend the Family Allowances Act. I want to deal with the very obvious one, that of deindexation of family allowances. I want to begin, however, by dealing with the section entitled "Presumption of Death".

Clause 15.1 of this Bill is a new section. It does not deal with the question of deindexation or the amounts payable for family allowances. It deals with the Minister having the right to declare a child dead or alive.

I want to deal with this in two ways: the psychological impact and the financial impact on families who may be affected. Before doing so, Mr. Speaker, I would like to read the three paragraphs under the portion "Presumption of Death":

(1) Where a child has, either before or after the coming into force of this section, disappeared under circumstances that, in the opinion of the Minister, raise beyond a reasonable doubt a presumption that the child is dead, the Minister may issue a certificate declaring that the child is presumed to be dead and stating the date on which the child's death is presumed to have occurred, and thereupon the child shall be deemed for all purposes of this Act to have died on the date so stated in the certificate.

(2) If, after issuing a certificate under subsection (1), the Minister is satisfied from new information or evidence that the date of death is different from that stated in the certificate, the Minister may revoke the certificate and issue a new certificate dating a different date, in which case the child named in the certificate shall be deemed for all purposes of this Act, to have died on the date so stated in the new certificate.

(3) If, after issuing a certificate under this section, the Minister is satisfied from new information or evidence that the child named in the certificate is alive, the Minister shall forthwith revoke the certificate and cause to be paid any allowance that would have been payable in respect of the child if the certificate had not been issued.

● (1700)

I am greatly concerned about this particular part of the Bill. Let us all think about what the impact would be on ourselves if

one of our children or grandchildren went missing. We all recognize that from time to time children go missing in Canada, some never to return. Of course there is a certain anguish on the part of the parents, the family and the community. We hear about abductions, runaways and murders. From time to time they are interrelated. However, we must consider the impact on mothers and fathers who still have some hope that their children are alive out there somewhere. For many of them that is all they have left—hope. What will happen if some bureaucrat, because obviously it would have to start at that level, decides that the period of absence has been long enough and the Minister must declare the child dead? What would that do to the hope of such parents? I ask all Hon. Members to think about that. I am sure we all know of instances in our communities where children have disappeared, have come to very unfortunate ends or have just never returned and no one knows where they are. In 1976, the last year in which Statistics Canada attempted to track disappeared children, there were still some 1,200 on the books as missing. I learned today from one of the organizations dealing with missing children that 90 per cent of all such children are abducted by one of their parents. We have heard of the stories involving a family separation, one parent receiving custody and the other parent deciding to abduct the child. I do not think we are talking about that because in most cases the parents know where the child is located. However, what about the remaining 10 per cent, the children abducted by non-family members or strangers for whatever purpose? For the first while a lot of work is done in the community, spearheaded by the parents and the authorities, in an attempt to find the child. The age range can be anywhere from one year old to some 17 or 18 years old. They always hold out hope, but this law will indicate to them that there is no more hope. For reasons of financial importance to the Government of Canada, the child will be declared dead and the Government will not have to pay the family allowance.

There is a psychological aspect and there is the actual financial impact on families who have, since their children went missing, spent every cent they could by posting rewards and by telephoning around the country. They scraped together every cent. Many times money is donated to the cause by friends and neighbours in the community. The Government would then come along and say that it is stopping the \$31 payment because the child is not living at home. However, the parents could still be looking out for the interests of the children by trying to find them and to bring them back into the warmth and security of home.

I understand why the Government needs some kind of mechanism. Currently, with the Statute of Limitations, I gather that it takes seven years to declare a child dead. Conceivably someone could be receiving family allowance for those seven years. If we require a mechanism, perhaps we could have some kind of suspension procedure rather than a declaration of death. In that event the Government could say that until the child returns home or until there is clear evidence that the child is no longer alive, it will temporarily