

Oral Questions

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, in response to the Hon. Member's question, I have looked at the report that was made available to me by the National Council of Welfare. There are a number of issues that I am examining.

In direct answer to the question of the Hon. Member, the Government's child care plan was quite clear. We presented it in the last Parliament. It was only blocked by the Liberal-dominated Senate in the last moments of that Parliament, and we intend to reintroduce it.

COUNCIL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, surely the Minister, who I know has some feeling for children and families in Canada, will not be so pigheaded as not to reconsider that legislation.

The past is the past and the Minister now has a golden opportunity to bring in more progressive legislation that will go beyond seven years, and which will help to meet the real needs of children.

Since the National Council of Welfare advocates the creation of 750,000 new spaces over the next seven years with no fixed ceiling on funds, and also a system of affordable fees which will make child care available and accessible to families regardless of income, does the Minister agree with these principles? If he does, will he take a look at the legislation, consult with the council and other groups, and with provincial people, if necessary, and come in with a program of which we can be proud in Canada?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I want to re-emphasize the underpinning of the Government's child care strategy, and that was choice. There was going to be choice for those parents who wanted their children in child care, choice for those parents who wanted their children in child care spaces related to the industry where those parents worked, and choice for those parents who decided that they wanted to stay at home with their children. That is the manner in which we approached the child care issue.

I say to the Hon. Member that, just as I am analyzing the report a little more fully, possibly the Hon. Member would also want to do that. The Hon. Member will discover that the recommendations assume a number of things, not least of which is that some of the greatest

benefits go to families in the higher income brackets. Possibly the Hon. Member has not looked at that quite as carefully as she might want to do now.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT—REQUEST FOR
EXTENSION OF PARENTAL LEAVE

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, if the Minister would look at it carefully he would see that that is exactly why we want those very regressive tax measures removed.

I would like to ask the Minister and his colleague, the Minister of Employment, in view of the importance of parents having choice to remain at home with young infants, will they now convince the Cabinet that it is extremely important to introduce parental leave of 15 weeks, and also that the Government not contravene the Charter of Rights by refusing to change the law, as was required by the courts of this land? That extension is needed and it is a right under the Charter that there be 15 more weeks of parental leave under the Unemployment Insurance Act.

• (1430)

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, in answer to the Hon. Member's question, the Government will make a decision in respect of parental leave. As the Hon. Member points out, there has been a court decision. The Minister of Employment and Immigration has chief responsibility in that regard, and she is working on that aspect of it.

A point that I would make to the Hon. Member is that, in all of the discussion on child care, she and her Party have taken a very singular role, that being that it should be a system dominated and run by government—

Ms. Mitchell: Not true.

Mr. Epp: In the Canadian context, that would mean a system operated by the provincial Governments.

That is not a system that this Government has adopted, nor is it a system that Canadian parents accept. In fact, it is not a system which has favourable support among the Canadian public generally.

If anyone should be rethinking their policy on child care, it is those who sit on the opposite side of this House.