

Point of Order—Ms. Copps

I think Hon. Members know—at least, they should know because the special committee recognized it—that any child care response would also have to take into consideration provincial jurisdiction, and that is important. That being the case, provincial jurisdiction requires us to negotiate with the provinces the kind of response that would be best in terms of a child care program for the country, and specifically for families in need of child care.

I have said as well, in the response to the chairperson of the special committee, that I was negotiating with the provinces—and I have been talking with a number of provinces during the summer as well—on the kind of approach which would be acceptable to them in view of two things; first, in view of provincial jurisdiction relative to child care and, second, in view of the spirit that I think should now prevail in terms of federal-provincial relations, namely, the Meech Lake Accord which the Prime Minister was able to conclude with 10 Premiers and which I think all of us are now instructed both morally and tactically to follow. That is the procedure I have taken.

The response is quite straightforward. I have responded within the period of time. I have identified it as an interim response. I have, therefore, fulfilled the requirements of the Standing Orders.

Additionally, I have indicated to the House and to the public generally the process the Government is taking with the provinces and that the debate is continuing within Cabinet.

I think the points I have made are not only in keeping with the new rules of the House but also are within the spirit of those rules.

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I concur completely with the Hon. Member for Hamilton East (Ms. Copps).

I received this very inadequate letter yesterday with great difficulty. It was not tabled in the House, as we understood it should have been. With great difficulty I got it from the Clerk's Office. It was addressed to "Mrs. Shirley Martin, Chairperson of the Special Committee on Child Care". There was no attempt by the Minister to provide copies to the opposition critics.

As we understand it, according to the rules it should have been a comprehensive response. In no way is this a comprehensive response.

I should like to ask the Minister, if he would be so kind as to give me his attention for a moment, why, for example, in this response there was no statement of national objectives for a national child care program.

He referred to the Meech Lake Accord. This is basic to the requirements under the Meech Lake Accord. How can he go into negotiations with the provinces when he does not have a federal position on which to negotiate? Surely, any federal position outlining national objectives should be developed with

Members of Parliament and should have been presented to the House.

We are very, very concerned about it. There have been long delays. A response was promised for June, and it was delayed again for the summer. This is completely inadequate. Now, of course, it is implied very vaguely that sometime in the fall there might be further information.

We concur completely with the criticism of this process and this Minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Robert Gauthier (Ottawa—Vanier): Mr. Speaker, I think the question is an important one, and I may remind the Hon. Member that according to the Votes and Proceedings of Tuesday, August 11, 1987, the Government actually did table a report yesterday, August 11. At page 1317, the document tabled by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) is described as follows, and I quote:

Interim Response of the Government of Canada, pursuant to Standing Order 99(2), to the Final Report of the Special Committee on Child Care (Sessional Paper No. 332-8/31), presented to the House on Monday March 30, 1987.

It is therefore false to claim the Government failed to table an answer. The point being made here, and it is a serious one, is that the so-called report tabled yesterday was not a comprehensive report on the subject. It was not a comprehensive report by the Government in response to the Committee's report. It was an interim report. There is nothing in the Standing Orders that provides that the Government shall or may table an interim report, according to Standing Order 99(2), which reads as follows:

Within 150 days of the presentation of a report from a standing or special committee, the government shall, upon the request of the Committee, table a comprehensive response thereto.

The Committee asked for a comprehensive report. It did not receive a comprehensive report but an interim report, and the Minister himself admitted as much, which is entirely unsatisfactory and irregular.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that the House has no recourse against a Government that is negligent and perhaps irresponsible. However, the question is an important one, it is a topical issue, and it is a subject on which the Government should respond. I ask the Government—since the Chair is not in a position to do so, it is up to them to make the decision—to respond as soon as possible to this important report on child care.

Mr. Speaker: I would like to put a question to the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier). Could the Hon. Member possibly give me a copy of the report?

An Hon. Member: Yes, there is one right here.

[*English*]

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a few brief comments on this very