

*Government Orders*

the excellent speech made by our leader, the hon. member for Oshawa the other day.

Our party has been clear on its position. That does not always mean it has been an easy position to take, because for many people, this issue goes perhaps to the root of some of the many concerns that they have.

Let us take a look at the legislation that the government has introduced. What is Bill C-43? The bill is an amendment to the Criminal Code that prohibits abortion at all stages of pregnancy unless a doctor decides that the continuation of the pregnancy would threaten the woman's physical, psychological or mental health. Doctors can be charged with an indictable offence subject to the penalty of imprisonment for up to two years.

We have been told in this House that the cabinet must support the bill. We have had some ministers say they will hold on and see just exactly what is going to happen with the legislation.

Our party stands proudly on our position, a well thought out one I might add as well, because of the work done by our caucus, the people who work behind the scenes and our critic as well.

What does the bill do that we find offensive in not dealing with the issue? I think that is part of the context of the comments that I would like to make. What does this legislation not do?

First of all, the bill reduces access to abortion by threatening doctors with criminal penalties unless some vaguely defined health criteria are met. It really ignores the whole issue of unwanted pregnancies.

We on this side of the House have suggested that the Canada Health Act was supported by members on the other side, the government side. When that legislation was introduced in the House, you will remember, there was some discussion at that time whether the Conservative members would actually support that legislation.

I spent some time looking at what the Canada Health Act is not doing with this legislation. It is punitive legislation and it does not get at the root of the problem. What is there in the family planning unit within Health and Welfare Canada? One position. Funding to planned parenthood is being cut.

The way to deal with problems like abortion and not have the extremes of debate is to deal with it in a preventive way. How can we do that?

What we do not have in this legislation or other legislation that might be brought before the House are changes that through the Canada Health Act can become the vehicle by which the government can deal with the question of access to abortion. This is a very important question, not just for those members who represent large metropolitan areas like Toronto where if a woman has a need for an abortion, it might be available. But what about the communities across this country that do not have that access? It is easy for someone from Toronto to have that access, but much more difficult for a woman in Prince Edward Island.

Equal access is guaranteed or should be guaranteed to us under the Charter of Rights in our Canadian Constitution. What can the Canada Health Act do? What I would suggest is, as our leader has very clearly pointed out, use the measures in that legislation to ensure that women across the country have equal access to abortion, when necessary.

I come from a province where the premier is wont to shove his ideas down our throats. Yet you must balance that against some very informative and thoughtful speeches, not just in this House, but elsewhere. I am reminded of the speech made by the Governor of New York, Mario Cuomo, who had to debate the merits as a practising Catholic with what that meant to him as a legislator. I recommend that article. It is an important one because it debates the issue that we in this House must deal with now as we debate this legislation.

On health care planning right now, there is a need to have a major federal-provincial review to look at the kind of work that we can do in this country both between the federal government and the provinces to ensure that we can have proper family life programs.

Because I do not think he understands, I think we should get the premier of our province before a committee here so he can learn and try to understand some of the problems and difficulties that many women have across this country. I think there is an obligation on the part of the federal government to ensure that he does understand, and in that case the provincial government of B.C. would bring in the necessary legislation and rules