

Canada Child Care Act

I believe in accountability for expenditures of public money. That is the issue for me. Just as our legislators in the various provinces have to be accountable to their people at election time, we in the federal Parliament have to be accountable to the people of Canada for the expenditures we make. Are we to revert to the days not so long ago when Parliament awarded money to provincial jurisdictions for the purpose of post-secondary education, a laudable purpose, only to find that at the end of the day the money the Government of Canada forwarded to those provinces was not being used for the purposes of post-secondary education for which they were meant but for building roads and drawing pre-election writs in the respective provinces? I suggest that is exactly what is happening with this particular legislation.

We as Members of Parliament are abdicating our responsibility on the fundamental principle of accountability. We have given the provinces so many millions of dollars to conduct child care, but we have not put in place national standards. We have not set pre-conditions and that is irresponsible. It is a breach of accountability and a breach of responsible government.

Joe Howe is a great Nova Scotian who campaigned vigorously across my province on the issue of responsible government, of accountability for the expenditure of taxpayers' money. That is the fundamental issue with Bill C-144. We give away the money without any national standards.

There are those in this Chamber who will say that the community of communities is our concept of Canada. If Ontario wishes to conduct its child care program in a certain way, so be it. If the people of Nova Scotia wish to conduct a program in that province, thank you very much.

But this is not just the use of provincial moneys from the respective provinces. It is the use of money of the Government of Canada, duly authorized by the Parliament of Canada. Therefore it is incumbent upon us to make certain that quality, accessibility, affordability, and those national standards are put in place by the Parliament of Canada and not some other level of government.

Let me try to put a human face on this particular issue of national standards. I recently spoke to constituents, a very dedicated and proud mother and proud father who are trying to provide for their children as best they can. I want to read parts of a letter, without referring to names specifically but to the substance of what this mother is saying. In my view, it addresses the issue of national standards and some of the major omissions in this particular Bill. She wrote:

I am the mother of four children—

Two children are mildly autistic. She continued:

I will briefly relate to you some of the problems we have faced trying to provide remedial help for our children. In 1976, while living in Ontario, our second child Shane, then two years old, was diagnosed as having autism. The prognosis was, to say the least, grim. He received help in a daycare-like setting that was fully funded by the Ontario Government. However, two years later, when we moved back to Nova Scotia, there were no such facilities and our only alternative, (albeit a good one), was the Town Daycare Centre.

The letter went on:

Our problems resurfaced again in 1986 when our son Mitchell, then 21 months, also exhibited the same symptoms—specifically a developmental profile characterized by lack of communication and social passivity. On the

advice of our pediatrician, we were referred to the Town Daycare Center. Even though it was a medical problem, we paid top rates again, our family income was over the set limit. Earlier that year, while working as a nurse, I sustained a severe back injury and, because I was not working I could not even claim the fees as a child care deduction on my income tax. Mitchell only attended daycare for eight months—

Listen to this:

—but the results were dramatic! Today, at three and a half, he presents as a talkative, cheerful and sociable young lad with only a hint of his past problems!

That is the human face. There is one law for Ontario and another law for Nova Scotia. There is one law for Québec and another law for Prince Edward Island. There is one law for British Columbia and yet a different one for New Brunswick.

Who do we sacrifice in the process because we, as federal Members of Parliament, have abdicated our responsibility to the people of Canada? National standards have not been included in this legislation.

When I speak of the disparity that can, does, and will exist as a result of the consummation of Bill C-144, it is real. It is not a make-believe, hypothetical problem which is discussed in ivory towers here in Ottawa. It is a real, human problem.

Doctors and educators agree that a day care social setting would help solve the problems of these children to whom I have referred. This lady has been forced to come up with \$650 per month to assist her children. It is a high price which she cannot afford. Canadian children deserve more and they deserve much more from their Government.

Are we here as Members of Parliament to be emissaries and diplomats for provincial Governments, or are we here in Ottawa to stand up for a national cause, the cause of children across this country? The Hon. Member standing next to you, Mr. Speaker, makes reference to the unborn, as do I, important as the issue is. However, when it comes to Bill C-144, there is not the intestinal fortitude to say to Bourassa in Québec, to Peterson in Ontario, that this is a national Parliament and these are national standards and if they do not comply they will get nothing. They will come running. They will have the wagons. They will have the vans. They will be parked out front waiting for their dollars. They will subscribe to the national standards of a national Government.

● (1740)

Mr. Harris: If we had one.

Mr. Dingwall: That is the issue, Mr. Speaker—if we had one. This Government is abdicating its responsibilities. Member after Member on the government side has stood up and talked about the wonders of this legislation. But for whom are the wonders? The wonders are for provincial Governments which may or may not share the objectives of the national Parliament or the will of the national Parliament. It is not the children we are talking about in this instance. The Government is not addressing the problems of child care for children. It is addressing the problems both fiscally and socially of provincial Governments. What could be more abominable, more revolting than Members of Parliament using the children of Canada to satisfy the political egos of provincial First Ministers and Governments across the country?