

of families or not, instead of looking at them in a scattered and fragmented way.

Mr. Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask the minister a very specific question.

During the course of his remarks, he talked about the government wanting to fulfil its commitment of two years ago to bring in the child care program. I want to ask the minister specifically when exactly can we expect that child care program to be brought into the House? Do we have a timetable? Is it going to be at the end of this term or is it going to be within the next month or two?

• (1230)

The fact is that we have waited a year since the election and there has been absolutely no indication of when there would be a bill, so I want to know, does he have a timetable that he can share with the House today?

Second, in bringing forward that legislation, has the government looked at the very serious criticisms raised by the number of associations representing child care workers and previous bill brought in by his predecessor which showed serious inadequacies? It was really not going to add any new spaces. It was going to sort of eliminate a number of the opportunities that child care should have. Can we expect a new, better, reformed, revised child care bill taking into account those commentaries and critiques that were raised by the child care community in Canada?

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, as the hon. gentleman knows, I wish that we had national child care legislation in place today. He knows as well as I do why we do not. The legislation died on the Order Paper before Parliament because of delays in the House of Commons and the Senate in getting it passed before Parliament was dissolved.

I think that members who opposed the bill made an error. I do not think the government ever held it out as something that was perfect or that was beyond improvement. But it would have given us a basis on which to establish a national child care system and on which to build and evolve a new system.

The commitment that has been made by the Prime Minister, by the Minister of Finance, by the Speech from the Throne, by myself and by the minister responsible for

Supply

the status of women has been that during the life of this Parliament, we will have a new program in place, not promised, not progressing through Parliament but in place.

In the meantime, we continue to fund programs for child care. As I mentioned earlier in my remarks, this year if you consider the tax measures, if you consider spending under CAP, if you consider the child care initiatives fund and a range of other initiatives we have taken, the federal government will be putting slightly less than \$1 billion into child care in Canada. It is a significant amount of money.

In the case of the Canada Assistance Plan, it is entirely open-ended. We are anticipating an increase of some \$40 million this year in transfers to the provinces under CAP. But if the provinces decide to increase spending on child care beyond that, the program is open-ended and the federal government will pay some 50 cents out of every dollar that is eligible that is spent by the provinces. As a consequence then we are seeing a significant commitment to child care and one which is going to increase.

The other element of the hon. member's question was whether the government is taking on board criticisms or comments or suggestions made by people in response to the previous legislation. Yes, we are.

I have had the opportunity to meet with my provincial colleagues and a number of national organizations and to visit a number of child care centres. As we come back to Parliament with proposals with regard to child care, what we will be doing is trying to ensure that the package we present to Parliament is one which is as contemporary and responsive to present circumstances as possible and one that meets the national need.

What is the need? The need is to dramatically increase the number of spaces in Canada. The need is to ensure that they are high quality spaces. The need is also to ensure that Canadian families have freedom of choice and that parents themselves have the ability to take a decision as to what the most appropriate form of child care is for them.

I think that within those principles, I am certainly open to have representations from any member of the House or from others with regard to what the nature of the program should be. But in the meantime, we are