

Adjournment Debate

Mr. G. M. Gurbin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the position of the Canadian Government has always been very clear. It is that our objective, both by the actions we take within Canada and the accord that we must reach with the United States, is to reduce the sulphur emissions that are falling on Canadian lakes, forests and territory by 50 per cent by 1994. The Hon. Member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) knows that full well. There has never been any question about that. If he would care to look at the other comments made by the Minister of the Environment (Mr. McMillan) and the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), indicating that we need to reach a bilateral accord with the United States, he would see that there remains no question about that.

We are fully aware of that position, but the issue here is whether we are going to be able to achieve it within the time frame and whether we are going to be able to achieve real results from real programs. I think that is a fair and legitimate question for everyone to ask. That is the reason the Minister said things the way he did on Sunday night and the reason the Prime Minister is not trying to tell anyone in Canada that the job is done or that there is not much more work to do.

● (1820)

In the time allotted to me, I have adequate time to account for the change in the position taken in 1981 when Mr. Reagan was here. Nothing substantial was accomplished by the previous Government or its Ministers to bring forward what we have today, that is, a significant breakthrough, and I am sure most fair-minded Canadians would agree. Apart from the real reductions which may result from the commitment of money and the co-operation of the American Congress with the American industry, we have a recognition that the problem is bilateral and requires a bilateral accord to achieve a successful result.

Mr. Caccia: We had that six years ago, in 1980.

Mr. Gurbin: If the process was there six years ago, it was going nowhere. I would have to say that the process was non-existent. The words were there, as were many of the comments of the Hon. Member for Davenport, but nothing was accomplished. It was not my criticism or that of the Government which indicated that time had been lost. It was a parliamentary committee which indicated that time had been lost not only in Canada—and the Government has put that in order by concluding provincial agreements—but in advancing the necessary agreements and bilateral accords with the Government of the United States. Precious time was lost in that five-year period. We are now on a substantially improved track. We all have honest and legitimate hopes that we will reach a successful conclusion within the next few years.

CHILD CARE—FUNDING OF SERVICES. (B) REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches): Mr. Speaker, on March 17, I asked the Minister of State for Immigration (Mr. McLean),

who is also responsible for the Status of Women, a question about child care. I asked whether the Government was prepared to provide additional funds for child care services as an indication of good faith in fulfilling its election promises. Unfortunately, as so often is the case, the response was vague. The Minister used the current parliamentary task force examining child care as an excuse to put off government action until some undefined time in the future.

The fact is that the need for greatly improved child care services has been proven time and time again. The Government should have committed funds in its recent Budget to child care. This would be an indication of good faith on the part of the Government, and it would be an indication that the parliamentary task force on child care actually means something. So far it seems as if the Government is willing to use the task force as a way of further stalling to avoid its commitment made at election time.

As an initial first step to show its serious intentions, the Government should commit \$300 million toward the child care system. That should be the Government's immediate response to an urgent situation. Over the next few months, the parliamentary task force on child care will draw up a plan to implement universal child care, but we should like to see a concrete demonstration of the Government's commitment.

The need for an improved publicly supported child care system has been demonstrated often. Some 20 or more studies in past years have documented the necessity of an expanded publicly funded system of child care. The recent task force chaired by Dr. Katie Cooke found that child care was in crisis in Canada. The current supply of licensed child care spaces is able to accommodate less than 9 per cent of children requiring non-parental care on a full-time basis. In the last 30 years the changes in family structures and the increase in the participation of women in the labour force have moved far ahead of government policy on child care.

The vast majority of Canadian women of child bearing age participate in the paid workforce. In 1983, 69 per cent of all women between the ages of 20 years and 44 years worked outside the home. Of course, this trend will continue. In 1983, 49 per cent of mothers with children under the age of three and 56 per cent of mothers with pre-schoolers in the three to five age group were in the paid labour force.

● (1825)

The percentage was even higher for mothers whose youngest child was between the ages of six and ten. The Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association pointed out in a recent report that there are about 172,000 spaces for children in licensed day care facilities, yet there are almost two million children 12 years old and under in Canada. For many families, licensed child care services are not available. Also, many families find quality child care unaffordable.

Because of unstable and patchwork funding for child care, it is hard to maintain high quality programs. Child care staff