

Canada Child Care Act

NDP said that this should be taken across the country because it needs more discussion, more study and more witnesses.

The people of this country are too smart for that kind of thinking. The NDP cannot say one thing in the House of Commons and something else in the cities across Canada.

As well, I want to comment on the suggestion and the implications that I think arise from the comments of the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell), and the Hon. Member for Kamloops—Shuswap (Mr. Riis), that somehow there is no funding available after the seven year period. That is absolutely incorrect.

There is a clause in the Bill which lays out minimum guarantees to the provinces of the level of funding which they will receive in year eight, which amounts to at least \$800 million per year. I recommend that the Members of the Opposition Parties read Clause 4(3) of the Bill which says, among other things, that an agreement will not be less than the contribution payable to the province in respect of the year ending March 31, 1995, the difference being adjusted to the national rate of inflation. There is provision beyond the seven-year period of time.

• (1510)

With respect to the 200,000 spaces, you will note in the preamble to Bill C-144, Madam Speaker, that it refers to at least "200,000 spaces". We have 160,000 subsidized day care spaces now in Canada.

Looking at the development in this particular area and assessing the need as we have found it across the country, as outlined in our own studies, it seems to me that 200,000 spaces is reasonable, but it is the minimum. We have said at least that. If the provinces can create more, we would of course support that. But we think it is a good start for developing in an orderly way a child care system that will meet the needs of Canadian families. I think that is a good thing.

I hope that the members of the NDP and the Liberal Party, instead of spreading improper misrepresentations with respect to this Bill, will get behind it. Canadians are going to be watching. They will be watching to see how they will vote on this important historic document, this historic piece of legislation brought forward by the Minister of Health in co-operation with the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and all the Members on this side of the House. I will be interested to see which way they will vote when it comes up for a vote later on today.

Hon. Herb Gray (Windsor West): Madam Speaker, Canadians certainly want and need a national program for the effective delivery of affordable and universally accessible quality child care. Unfortunately, the Conservative Government's Bill C-144 does not do that. It fails to recognize the changing realities in our society. It fails to address the fundamental issues connected with the needs for child care of Canadians and their families.

The rhetoric of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) and the rhetoric of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) have been aimed at cultivating a pre-election impression that the Conservative child care strategy will meet the needs of parents and children across the country as soon as it is passed. The Government's public relations campaign conducted over the past two months both inside and outside this House, however, can do no more than generate false hopes, to be followed by dashed expectations on the part of Canadians.

Contrary to what the Prime Minister said a few days ago, Bill C-144, if and when it ever becomes law, will not add one more child care space to the quantity existing in the country at the very point in time at which it is passed. For the Bill to have any effect there must first be the negotiation and the signature of agreements with the provinces pursuant to the Bill, likely a lengthy process. In any event, it would appear, and I will say something about this in a few minutes, the Bill will provide fewer child care spaces than would have been the case under the existing Canada Assistance Plan.

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Government's own advisory body, concluded in its brief which it presented to the legislative committee studying this Bill with the reasoned judgment that, and I quote: "Bill C-144 raises but does not resolve the essential questions of child care. Its most important features are left for clarification by regulation are open to conjecture. It is a legislative shell".

The child care needs of Canadian parents and their children will not be met by the passage of a hollow legislative shell rammed through the House of Commons by time allocation, another form of closure, because the Conservatives want to try to put something over on Canadians during a general election, something I say, Madam Speaker, they will not accomplish.

Let me refer, Madam Speaker, to the legislative committee which studied Bill C-144. It is very significant that not only the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women but also not one of the 40 groups that appeared before that committee as witnesses could support the passage of Bill C-144. We are talking about the most knowledgeable, the most informed, the most representative child care advocacy groups in the country.

Currently there are almost one million women in the workforce with pre-school children who require all-day care. There are two million women in the workforce with children under 16 years of age, many of whom require some form of care just before or for a few hours after the school day is over—the latchkey children.

In 1986 when this Conservative Government was dithering on this matter and doing nothing, when 52 per cent of Canadian women with children under the age of three were working outside the home and nearly two million children under 13 likely needed full-time care, there were fewer than 200,000 spaces. In fact, there were only some 172,000 spaces provided for quality day care. Presently it is estimated that