

*Canada Child Care Act*

previous administrations tried to tell the Canadian people that there was only one way to proceed. Canadians have always rebelled at that because it goes against their will. I am constantly amazed by the people opposite who, on the one hand, spend a great deal of their time promoting the pluralism and multiculturalism of Canadian society and, on the other, require that all Canadians subscribe to a specific, rigid line of conduct.

These Members demand that the federal Government establish a universal, institutionalized child care system without considering the many ways Canadians take care of their children. They are also the ones who say that the Government must not allow parents to stay at home to look after their children, if that is their wish, or to leave their children in the care of an unofficial service, a family member or a neighbour if that works better for them.

The Canadian people also recognize that paying for child care services is first of all the parents' responsibility. Parents want some help, because paying for child care services can be quite a heavy financial burden for a family. But there is no doubt that they want this assistance given to them on their own terms.

Mr. Speaker, most Canadian families would reject government assistance if it meant having to raise their children the way the Government feels they should.

If you look at the Government's child care strategy from this perspective, you will immediately realize how well adapted it is to the way Canadian families live and what they believe in. The strategy supports all child care options, from fully subsidized spaces to parents who choose to pay the total cost of official services in a private setting, and includes those who decide to stay at home because they believe that this is best for their family.

The purpose of the national child care strategy is not to restrict the options available to parents and families; rather, it is meant to help parents choose the solution best suited to their family's needs and to ensure that these options are less costly, whatever the family's financial situation. The tax measures announced as part of the strategy provide tax credits as well as higher deductions for child care expenses as ways to keep parents' child care options open.

Canadians are extremely well disposed to the need for subsidized day care spaces, especially for single-parent families. No parent who has had to look for a quality space for her or his children denies the need for more such spaces, subsidized or not.

In its strategy, the Government is committed to doubling the number of subsidized spaces over the next seven years. This means that if this goal is reached, the number will increase from 200,000 to 400,000 during the period of growth envisaged by the strategy and the Bill now being debated. But hold on, it does not mean that Canada will have only 400,000 day care spaces all told. Indeed these will be the only spaces

for which the federal and provincial governments will pay all or most installation costs.

Complementary family day care facilities are not included in these figures, nor are neighbouring services or more formal private services which are now completely paid for by parents. Thanks to higher day care tax deductions, private services will become less of a financial drain on Canadian families. The resulting stronger demand might trigger a virtual explosion of the number of spaces made available this way.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that when consumers pick up the whole tab for a readily available service it has to live up to their expectations. If on top of that you consider the legislative provisions under which the provinces are required to define and implement child care service standards, I would suggest that parents will be surprised to find out how quickly day care services—public and private alike—will meet the requirements of parents, communities, and provincial authorities.

When it comes to child care services, Canadians have taken a pragmatic approach, as they did in connection with a number of other social issues. Canadians do not believe that the problem can be solved overnight, nor that a mere statement of principle by the Government will solve everything. I do not think that people are overly concerned whether a day care service is operated by a non-profit organization or by a commercial undertaking. The bottom line is not who runs the operation but how good are the services available.

Of course if there is one aspect about which all parents see eye to eye it has to be the need to improve the quality of child care services throughout the country. Mr. Speaker, this should not be interpreted to imply that existing services are downright inferior and fail to meet the basic needs of children, quite the contrary. This is just another indication that parents want their children to have the best they can afford, and this includes quality services when they simply cannot personally look after their children.

Under Section 4 of the Bill, the federal Government is firmly committed to improving child care standards in very many respects: child/person ratios, parent participation, health and safety measures, programming, to name only a few. However, a practical and realistic approach had to be designed in relation to child care standards. Canadians don't want arbitrary standards to be forced upon them as if they did not know what is best for their children.

I believe parents want to be sure that child care standards reflect their values as well as those of the communities and the regions where they live and to which they relate. In other words, Mr. Speaker, parents want to have a say in the quality standards which will apply to the care their children will be receiving.

I challenge any Member of this House to say that he or she knows what are the needs and concerns of Canadian parents. Once you have said child care services must conform to the highest quality standards, you can say no more without