

Supply

• (1040)

I am not sure that people really understand viscerally that there are one million children using food banks, that there are one million latchkey children, that child care even for those who are financially well set is not that easy to find.

The long-range difficulty will continue to be a long-range difficulty until the make-up of this House and every legislature in the country reflects the population. Until 52 per cent of legislators, provincially and federally, are female we will still have that difficulty. There are none so blind as those who cannot see.

Mr. Guy H. Arseneault (Restigouche—Chaleur): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to congratulate the hon. member for Halifax for the eloquent speech and come back to a topic that she raised in some detail in her speech, and that is the child care program.

I also am a supporter of her point of view that a national child care program is a necessity. I quite agree, as she has stated, that it is not the total solution to the problem but it would certainly go a long way.

I would like her to comment on the existing programs that are available. More specifically, this time of the year is income tax time and Revenue Canada has provisions with regard to child care. I would ask the hon. member her opinion on whether she thinks that these regulations are biased in favour of those who have money, the rich, and do nothing for those who are disadvantaged at the low level of the scale, many of whom are women.

Ms. Clancy: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from New Brunswick for his very cogent question.

In answer, we know that the government has removed more than \$3.5 billion from the child benefit system since 1986, \$3.5 billion. The government's blueprint for child benefits reform is inadequate as an anti-poverty measure.

Single mothers on social assistance will receive no additional benefit from this measure. Let me underline that, no additional benefit. Single mothers with annual incomes of between \$30,000 and \$40,000 will receive only \$44 more a year. The child benefit is not fully indexed to inflation and therefore its value will decrease over time.

It is misleading for this government to tell Canadians that a choice had to be made between child care and programs aimed at children at risk. Glenda Simms,

president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, clearly identified the gap in logic. Child care prevents children being at risk. Why is the government therefore attempting to pit abused and hungry children against Canadian children who are in need of safe and affordable child care? It is a disgrace.

We have a problem right now with the situation as it stands. The provinces have varying and different programs. Some provinces have better programs than others; some provinces have more money to spend than others. There is no standardized child care across this country. A parent who is looking for child care has very little in the way of quality control to understand what it is. If I have time I would just like to illustrate with a brief example.

I was president of the board of the largest child care centre in Atlantic Canada, St. Joseph's Children's Centre in Halifax. I was on the board for about eight years and president of the board for three. This was an excellent facility. Through our work there we dealt with other excellent child care facilities as well.

I had a colleague, another lawyer, who was involved with another child care organization. Indeed, he was on the board. Midway through his term on the board it was discovered that the standards at the other child care facility—not the one I was involved with but the other one—had fallen well below provincial regulatory levels, that there were indeed serious problems. What had happened, as frequently happens, is the people in charge were frightened. They were afraid of losing jobs, et cetera. We all know the scenario. I remember my colleague being absolutely flabbergasted that he could be involved with this and not have known right away. It did not go on very long. It only went for about a month, but to have children in inadequate care for even a month is not a very good thing.

This sort of thing goes on over and over again. The only thing that is going to cure it is national standards and a national program for all Canadians.

Hon. Mary Collins (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to participate in this debate and to discuss with my colleagues in the House the unequivocal and firm commitment of our government to equality of women in this country.