

Supply

children living in poverty as we have for each and every year since 1984.

In a few short weeks we will be entering a new decade. This is a good time for us to reflect on the very real progress that we have made in the past and to think about what accomplishments we want in the 1990s. Any society that cares about its future must care about the plight of its children today. This government has demonstrated that commitment and I can assure you it will continue to demonstrate that commitment.

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I listened with care to the minister's remarks. I appreciate that he did not have some overnight programs to introduce today. On the other hand, I would like to ask him if he would be prepared to make a commitment to the proposal put by my leader earlier, and that is to give leadership to calling together a national conference on the topic of elimination of child poverty.

If I recall correctly, my leader described this as a vehicle that certainly needs government leadership and would involve provinces. More than that, it would involve poverty groups, chambers of commerce, voluntary groups and all other groups that are able to become involved in solutions to poverty.

He also proposed that this action group meet annually, establish timetables and targets and have a monitoring function.

I would like to add to that. During Question Period the minister felt he was unable to answer anything about housing or tax measures, things that were in other departments, or whether such a conference would involve a number of federal ministries so that there would be a comprehensive consideration of solutions and then an action plan.

Would he commit himself to at least calling this kind of a conference during the next year?

Mr. Beatty: Mr. Speaker, in his remarks the leader of the New Democratic party made about six or seven separate proposals for steps that he felt would be important steps in dealing with poverty, ranging from increasing subsidized housing to increasing the minimum wage to having a continuing national conference with regard to child poverty.

Certainly we will look at all of the recommendation he made. We are pleased to do that. We appreciate any suggestions that are made by him and by his colleagues. Additionally, the issue of poverty is obviously one that is on the agenda on a continuing basis when we meet with the provinces and when we meet with colleagues from other departments.

The focus I have had during the time which I have been Minister of National Health and Welfare is broader than simply the focus on child poverty. I think that is one essential element of the concern we should have. My concern has been a broader one in trying to look at problems of families. It means economic problems, social problems such as familial violence. It means problems such as child sexual abuse. It means a whole range of other issues that we should be pulling together and not looking at in a disjointed, separate isolated way. Rather the tests that we want to apply, the government initiatives at all levels, should be: Are these initiatives supportive of families? Do they help families to function well and do they help with interventions in cases where families become disfunctioning?

Today the leader of the NDP asked me to give a commitment with regard to increased subsidized housing. One of the areas where the government has acted and which I can tell him about today where significant progress has been made is in Project Haven, a program that was under the leadership of my colleague who is responsible for housing.

What we have done is significantly increase moneys going to the provinces to provide shelters for women and for children who are in homes which are abusive. We are pleased to say that the take-up on that program has been very considerable by the provinces. It allows us to intervene in instances where children and wives are in situations where they are physically in danger and to provide alternatives.

The leader of the NDP would no doubt propose other initiatives that we could take as well. We are glad to take a look at any of those. I think it is important when we deal with family measures to not look at them simply in an isolated way, independent of everything else that is being done, but begin to stitch them together, take a much more holistic approach and begin to apply a test to government programs as to whether they are supportive