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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ)): In accordance with the order of reference of last November 22, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities is today continuing its review of Bill C-303. We have witnesses here, in Ottawa, as well as one witness joining us by videoconference, Mr. Shanker, whom we also welcome. Each group has seven minutes for its presentation.

As we, the members, expect to be summoned as of 5:15 p.m. for a vote being held, I suggest that each member have two five-minute opportunities to go around the table, until the vote is held at 5:30 p.m.

Without further delay, I give the floor to our guests. You have seven minutes to give your presentations. If you agree, we will start with Mr. Shanker, who joins us by videoconference.

[English]

Mr. Stuart Shanker (President, Council for Early Child Development): Thank you very much.

I've been invited to speak to you because I wear two different hats. One of them is that I'm the director of a neuroscience institute at York University, and the other one is I am the president of the Council for Early Child Development.

I won't try to go over all the material that was submitted to you, but I'll instead focus on two critical points that bear on this committee's decision-making, particularly as you try to come to terms with the cost-benefits of this kind of investment in early child development.

The first point relates to our understanding today of the extent of children with biological compromises that are going to significantly constrain their ability to flourish in a school environment.

There is a continuum of problems. These problems can range anywhere from the very severe, which will result in a child who has a diagnosable disorder, to a child with a relatively mild compromise, which will nonetheless significantly constrain the child's ability to pay attention, to form friendships, and to understand the rules and regulations of a school environment. We're talking about a very broad range of children. We estimate that anywhere from 50% to 60% of our children have various subtle or significant challenges in the ways they process information.

As we study how the brain develops, we also know that by the time a child is six or seven years old and the child enters school, the brain has established trajectories that are very difficult to change at that point. This is the reason we hear from so many educators and administrators that they essentially can predict how well a child will do in school from the child's very earliest experiences in a school environment. If we want to enhance a child's developmental potential, we have to reach the child very early.

The second point is directly related to this. Over the last five to seven years, one of the most exciting breakthroughs that have happened in developmental neuroscience is that we are growing very quickly in our capacity to identify children at a very young age who are displaying subtle signs in their capacity to pay attention, to regulate their own behaviour, or to understand someone else's communicative gestures. If we intervene with these children at this point—and such interventions are the kinds of things that can easily be done within child development centres such as the one we are proposing—we can either significantly mitigate or, in many cases, actually prevent the kinds of escalating problems that we are now seeing in our children today.

As we try to make sense of what's happening in our society, we see all kinds of stresses and physical, environmental, and social changes that seem to result in an increased number of the kinds of biological problems that I'm talking about. In part, it's simply a result of the kinds of demands we're making on our children; in part, it's a result of a rapidly changing social environment for children.

This bill presents us with the opportunity to discuss how we can institute a universal program. It has to be universal, because the science we're doing shows us these problems afflict all sectors of society. In fact, the largest number of children I see in my own institute come from relatively wealthy middle-class environments.

With this universal program, our intention is not only to enhance whatever the child's core capacities are; it's to pick up and prevent the escalation of these problems such that by the time they get into a normal school system, which is when they're generally identified, it's already very difficult to change that child's outcomes.

• (1540)

I will end on that, because I believe I am very close to my seven minutes. But please do let me know if you'd like me to expand on any of the remarks I have made.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You still have some time, Mr. Shanker.

[*English*]

Mr. Stuart Shanker: What I should tell you, then, is what we do in my institute.

We work with all ranges of children, not simply children who have very serious problems, but also children who have difficulty understanding what another child is trying to do in play. We work with a broad range of these kids, and what we study is how their brains are developing. We are now in a position where (a) we can identify what constitutes a healthy brain development trajectory, and (b) we can identify what are the experiences that a child must receive in order to have this healthy functioning.

Everything we do tells us that the parent must play the critical role in this process, so our whole program is designed around providing parents with tools. And we provide these tools not in a classroom setting but simply by working with parents, providing them with the tools such that they can either enhance how their child's brain will develop or spot problems early and take effective remedial steps to significantly reduce the severity of that problem.

We are also studying countries that have launched large-scale population programs, universal programs based on exactly the principles I'm describing here, and so far what we see is not only much higher rates of literacy, much lower rates of social problems, but also significantly lower rates of the kinds of developmental, psychological, and behavioural disorders that are escalating dramatically in our own country.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Mr. Shanker. Now we will hear Ms. Gott and Ms. Wilson, from Rural Voices for Early Childhood Education and Care.

[*English*]

Ms. Carol Gott (Co-Manager, Rural Voices for Child Care): Good afternoon.

My name is Carol Gott, and along with my colleague Jane Wilson, I co-manage Rural Voices for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Rural Voices is a broker of knowledge, learning, and best practices in early childhood education and care locally, provincially, and nationally.

Each of you has our submitted brief, so our intention today is to say a few words to summarize our views.

Jane and I both volunteer our time and energy to provide this link between rural, remote, and northern communities across Canada because we know first-hand how difficult it is to develop responsive, flexible, quality services in our rural communities for families and children.

It is difficult, but not impossible. It's not impossible, but it's certainly not probable, simply because, as a country, we have not made it a priority to ensure that every child in this country receives the best start in life and that every parent, regardless of their work status, receives our utmost support in their parenting role.

This will not be achieved by leaving leadership on child care issues at the provincial-territorial arena alone. To hope that, as a country, each province and territory will have the political will or the financial ability to ensure equity of access to quality child care services and supports is not socially responsible. For decades, child care has been the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial governments, yet the most critical issue in rural, remote, and northern Canada remains access to quality child care services. This is true whether you are in rural Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, the Yukon, or any other province or territory in this nation.

We can only assure equity of access to services through federal leadership, a leadership that begins with the approval of Bill C-303.

As each community across rural, remote, and northern Canada sees themselves as different and distinct, so does each province and territory. Although this diversity does us well at a local level, it hinders our ability to act as a nation, a nation that needs to strongly support our youngest citizens.

We have research that affirms the benefits of quality child care for children and families, and now recently we have rural research from the University of Manitoba that affirms the economic benefits of child care as well.

We can tell you, from our travels and work with Rural Voices across this country, that the benefits of quality child care for children, families, and communities are much more powerful and long term than any document could adequately attest. Although it's only a beginning, Rural Voices believes that Bill C-303 will develop a framework to support the challenges that rural, remote, and northern Canadians live every day.

Thank you.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Does that complete your presentation or do you have something to add, Ms. Wilson?

It is complete as far as you are concerned?

[*English*]

Ms. Carol Gott: Yes, the only thing we would remind people about from the brief is that when we talk about child care, we mean a whole continuum of services and care that goes well beyond the traditional view of child care. Certainly in this country, and in many provinces and territories, it's referred to as early childhood education and care.

So we're certainly talking about licensed non-profit services, but we're also talking about supports to families through home support or resource-type services, as well as supports to informal providers in their communities. Certainly in rural Canada, when we speak of child care, we're speaking of something that's quite broad. It also includes children zero to twelve, which is usually not the case in terms of the political arena.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Ms. Gott.

Now it is the turn of Mr. Dinsdale, from the National Association of Friendship Centres.

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale (Executive Director, National Association of Friendship Centres): Thank you.

I'd like to begin by thanking the committee for the opportunity to present before you today on Bill C-303.

My name is Peter Dinsdale and I am the executive director of the National Association of Friendship Centres.

In case you're not aware, friendship centres are community agencies that are mandated to improve the quality of life of urban aboriginal people. We are a service delivery body, not a political voice or representative body, and we are there for urban aboriginal first nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

Today there are over 117 friendship centres across Canada from coast to coast to coast and, hopefully, in most of these MPs' ridings as well.

According to the 2001 census, 50% of all aboriginal people live in urban areas, 50% of all aboriginal people are under the age of 25, and 50% of all aboriginal people do not graduate from high school. We are very young, very urban, and a very impoverished population. And according to research conducted by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 50% of all aboriginal children grow up in poverty in this country today.

In short, we work for an incredibly important segment of the Canadian population to be served by this legislation.

Friendship centres are active in early learning and child care as well. Across the country, there are over 30 friendship centres providing direct day care facilities through over \$7.5 million in programming supports. These programs are only one portion of the \$19.5 million spent on general family programs out of the total \$114 million provided in programming across the friendship centre movement each year.

Like all who are here before you, we have certainly read Bill C-303 and are prepared to make our comments on it. I only want to raise for your attention that we have submitted a brief that details our support for early learning and child care programming. There is no question that the friendship centre movement sees the need for a national network to be in place.

But with Bill C-303, we would like to make a number of observations, and we have some concerns based on it. We're not sure that the appropriate framework exists for directing provincial areas of responsibility with such vigour. Will the appropriate resources be secured to fund the rigorous standards outlined? However, my most troubling question and the most troubling for us in general is how this bill impacts aboriginal people and the friendship centres that we serve. How will this bill apply on-reserve?

The bill does not discuss the challenge of this program, paid for by the federal government, monitored by the provinces and territories,

and administered by local profit and non-profit organizations, to navigate the jurisdictional minefields that exist in this area. It is also not clear how this bill would impact friendship centres as potential non-profit partners for the delivery of these services.

Using the lens of friendship centres and the clients we serve, I'd like to comment on five troubling aspects for us.

The first is the notion of universality. What would this mean for urban aboriginal access? It needs to be understood that equal access does not always mean equal outcomes. Given the tremendous social barriers facing aboriginal peoples, it is essential that aboriginal-specific programming exists.

It is important for a number of reasons. Culture-based programs have been shown to be more effective at reaching aboriginal clients. Intergenerational reconnection is an important element to aboriginal programming. Positive role models, community reconnections, healing for the family and their extended family, traditional skills rediscovery, and comparable services all mean a more successful outcome for that child and the parents.

The second area of concern is the notion of tariff. Even the most modest of tariffs for access will be a significant barrier for urban aboriginal people. The average income for aboriginal people is \$14,533, according to the 2001 census, versus \$19,000 for non-aboriginal people. Aboriginal household income is 87% of that of non-aboriginal households. And aboriginal people's unemployment rate is 19.1% versus 7.4% for the non-aboriginal population.

We're impoverished. Any tariff for aboriginal families is a significant barrier that must be addressed.

Our third area of concern centres around the notions of indicators of availability. While it is clear that the minds of the bill's drafters are turned to ensuring that the widest possible geographic access is being considered, it does not once again provide any comfort that aboriginal people are considered an important client for availability and programming.

Our fourth area of concern rests with the indicators of affordability. It states that service fees should be set at a percentage of average wages for each jurisdiction. It simply reinforces that aboriginal people will have unequal access, as our wages are far behind any average in any jurisdiction.

The fifth area of concern is around the indicators of accessibility. Once again, the drafters' minds are turned to ensuring broad access in terms of eligibility requirements, with a percentage for special needs and other geographic considerations. There also appears to be an inherent contradiction in using income levels of parents as an accessibility measure. Single parents and their prevalence in our community will certainly skew our access, and the ability to pay the aforementioned percent of the region's average wage will further reinforce that.

• (1550)

Finally, and maybe most troubling, the bill does not recognize the jurisdiction of first nation, Métis, or Inuit peoples to provide for their own programming and to serve their own people. It seems not to have considered aboriginal people from either a governance, service delivery, or access basis. But we want to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. There is no question that more early learning child care spaces are needed across this country, and this is a noble attempt to do that. However, it is our assessment that should this bill in its present form become law, it will have a minimal impact for aboriginal peoples for all the areas raised.

Once again, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee. I look forward to any questions you might have.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Mr. Dinsdale. We are going to continue with Ms. Bird and Ms. Kass, from the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

[*English*]

Ms. Jamie Kass (Co-President, Child Care Working Group, Canadian Union of Public Employees): Good afternoon. My name is Jamie Kass. I'm the chair of the child care working group of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

I want to send regrets from Paul Moist, the president of CUPE, who intended to be here but got fogged in on his way back from Gander, Newfoundland.

CUPE is the largest union in Canada, representing employees in diverse sectors, including child care. We are also part of the Canadian Labour Congress, which supports our position and represents approximately three million people.

Shellie Bird and I are going to split CUPE's short presentation.

Child care is a major issue for many CUPE members. Two-thirds of CUPE members are women, and women still bear the major responsibility for child rearing.

I want to start by stressing the need for a legislative framework if we are to build a national child care system. Recent federal governments have stepped back from their important legislative role of setting the framework for social programs. Instead, they favour federal-provincial-territorial agreements that exclude Parliament. These agreements, as we've recently been reminded, can be cancelled by a unilateral act, without any parliamentary debate.

Legislation provides transparency. Bilateral agreements are usually negotiated behind closed doors and often represent the

lowest common denominator of federal and provincial policies. Now it appears the government is moving away from agreements, favouring transfers to provinces, with no obligation or framework to establish programs. The results are an international disgrace.

A recent OECD study found that Canada was the sole country without a goal for early learning and child care. We have not answered the OECD's call for a policy framework and improved monitoring. The annual report to Parliament, in Bill C-303, will contain information needed to develop and improve a Canadian early learning and child care system.

CUPE also supports Bill C-303's approach to the problems of commercial services. In 2004, CUPE warned about the trade consequences of establishing a publicly funded and privately delivered child care system, given Canada's obligations under various international agreements.

In a nutshell, the investment and services rules in international trade would likely apply to child care services if they're commercially provided. Both NAFTA and the GATS trade disciplines would deny governments the right to prevent foreign child care companies from acquiring a dominant position in the sector. Under the GATS, the government's ability to create and maintain standards in the child care sector would be severely limited. These are risks we must not take with the new national program.

Restricting the expansion of commercial child care is not just a trade issue. A new report underscores the importance of making sure our new cross-Canada child care system is not for profit. This national study adds to the large body of evidence that non-profit child care centres have the highest-quality care.

Our concern about commercial expansion is not alarmist. Australia's experience with for-profit care is a warning for Canadians. In 1991, Australia had a predominantly not-for-profit child care infrastructure. Then the government opened up funding for the for-profit sector. Now more than 70% of the sector is commercially owned.

The largest child care corporation in Australia, and the world, is ABC Learning Centres. In the same year that ABC's profits skyrocketed, Australia ranked extremely low in an OECD child care report.

We're pleased to see the clear commitment to a public not-for-profit child care system in Bill C-303.

Shellie is going to complete our presentation with a focus on the workforce.

•(1555)

Ms. Shellie Bird (Education Officer, Local 2204, Child Care Workers, Ottawa, Canadian Union of Public Employees): Thank you.

CUPE Local 2204 represents 230 early childhood educators, cooks, cleaners and clerical staff in 12 child care centres here in the city of Ottawa, and we count ourselves among the 10,000 child care workers whom our national union represents.

Our members, along with thousands of other child care workers, support Bill C-303 because it acknowledges the direct relationship between quality early learning and child care and the need to invest in the child care workforce.

In our submission, we point out what you have no doubt heard countless times: our world has changed. A majority of parents with children are in the workforce, and consequently, millions of Canadian children require access to non-parental child care.

We also know that who these children spend their day with has huge implications for the kind of care and education they receive, yet child care workers are largely undervalued, underpaid, and unrecognized. The failure of governments to acknowledge staff as a key linchpin for quality or to take action to address chronically low wages, poor benefits, and working conditions in our sector means fewer people are coming into our field or choosing to stay once they do. We cannot expect to improve quality early learning and child care if we are not prepared as a nation to recognize the vital role the people who work with young children play.

My training, knowledge, and 26 years of experience working with young children gives me a real advantage in providing them with supportive and intentional learning opportunities that help them to grow. At the risk of boasting, I liken what I do in supporting children in our program, purposely and with intention, building their trust, their respect, their comfort and sense of belonging, and their efficacy in managing their environment to the skill and precision of a surgeon with a scalpel.

Supporting children to build relationships with their peers, find positive ways to work out their differences, to make their needs known, to share, to be angry, to be hurt and to make up, and to learn and experiment without judgment are specific skills I have developed and honed over my years, to the benefit of the children I work with. We need more of this, not less.

This bill, if adequately funded, will give our sector the ability to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions so that we can attract and retain a highly motivated and engaged early learning and child care workforce and ultimately give children what we know they need to flourish and grow and go on to become productive and engaged citizens.

Thank you.

•(1600)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Ms. Kass and Ms. Bird. We will have a chance to ask you some questions in a while.

Let us now listen to Ms. Dallaire and Ms. Lysack, from the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

[English]

Mrs. Jody Dallaire (Chair, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada): My name is Jody Dallaire. I am the chairperson of the national organization called the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

With me today is Monica Lysack, our executive director.

I'm going to be giving my remarks partly in French and partly in English, and I'm going to start in French.

[Translation]

This year, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada celebrates 25 years of advocacy for quality child care. Our membership reaches more than four million Canadians from across the country, including parents, educators, researchers and students, as well as various organizations at the provincial, territorial, regional and national levels.

I am here today to express our support for C-303. When passed, this bill will ensure accountability for funds that are directed towards building a learning and child care system. All federal parties agree that we want the best possible experiences and outcomes for our children.

Child care supports healthy child development, reduces child poverty, promotes women's equality, deepens social inclusion and advances a knowledge-based economy and therefore ongoing economic prosperity. Moreover, improving child care services will help Canada meet its commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which names child care services as one of the fundamental rights all children should enjoy.

Quality child care is a public good, and should be treated as such in terms of public policy, public investment and public accountability. Bill C-303 represents a significant step forward for child care services in Canada. This legislation lays the foundation for us to move from the current patchwork of expensive services of varying quality, funded primarily by user fees, to a framework that provides families with a choice of affordable, high-quality, community-based services, in licensed homes and centres, with both part-time and full-time programs.

The members and partners of our association envision a Canada where all children are supported by publicly funded, quality child care services. Like libraries and schools, child care programs should be a natural and expected part of our neighbourhoods. They should be available, accessible and affordable for all families that choose to use them.

• (1605)

[English]

Bill C-303 supports the community's vision for child care in Canada. In 2004, following a year of consultations, our vision was to translate it into a set of policy recommendations, which were put into a document called "From Patchwork to Framework: A Child Care Strategy for Canada".

The first recommendation calls for legislation that defines and frames the implementation of child care in Canada. Our organization believes that when substantial public funding is available to build a system, as outlined in Bill C-303, new growth and expansion should be in the public and not-for-profit sector.

We advocate for the grandfathering of existing commercial facilities, as outlined in Bill C-303. This recommendation is based on the lessons learned about market failure and the current user fee subsidy approach and on extensive research about how public, community-owned and -operated child care promotes quality and accountability for public funds.

Bill C-303 acknowledges that child care falls within provincial-territorial jurisdiction and supports the communities to develop their own priorities. Having said this, we support the clause recognizing that Quebec has expanded its early learning and child care programs to ensure better accessibility than other provinces and territories.

Nevertheless, recognizing the diversity of Canadian communities does not mean accepting the existing disparity in services. All children and families, including those with disabilities, those from rural, remote, and northern communities, aboriginal families, and families from various backgrounds, should be entitled to quality and affordable child care services.

With child care legislation in place, communities and governments at all levels can work together to plan and implement a pan-Canadian child care system. We can build a system based on the existing government commitments to improve access to quality, affordable, and inclusive child care services, as outlined in the multilateral framework agreements in 2003, and we can begin to actually achieve these goals. The CCAAC has developed tools, such as a child care system implementation model, that support communities and governments in their joint efforts to advance a universal system.

Finally, legislation such as Bill C-303 is essential to accountability. Our experience in Canada over the last thirty years clearly demonstrates that we cannot leave the development of quality and affordable child care services to chance, nor can we rely solely on the minimal accountability provisions of existing intergovernmental agreements, such as those found in the multilateral framework.

Recent federal transfers have only required governments to report to the public, not to their legislatures. We note that most provinces

and territories have not reported on how the federal transfers have been spent since 2004-05.

Since the only real accountability mechanism for analyzing and commenting on new investments is through public monitoring and pressure, this accountability mechanism places a lot of responsibility on communities. While community capacity-building, such as that provided by the CCAAC, can support citizens in this important work, our preliminary observations raise questions about the heavy reliance on this approach as the primary accountability mechanism when parents and community groups are already strapped for time and over-burdened.

In addition to reporting to the public, governments need to report to their legislatures. Public reporting should be complemented with legislated standards, such as those outlined in Bill C-303. Accountability for public funds requires no less.

It's easy for us to say that supporting children and families is important, but we call on our elected representatives to make these words real by passing Bill C-303.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): I want to thank everyone for their presentations.

I want to thank Mr. Lessard as well for taking the chair while I was speaking in the House. I appreciate it.

Due to limited time, because we have votes and the bells will start ringing at about quarter after five, we're going to do our first round for five minutes each.

We'll have Mr. Savage begin.

• (1610)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses who are appearing today.

First of all, Mr. Shanker, is it doctor or mister?

Mr. Stuart Shanker: It's doctor.

Mr. Michael Savage: Dr. Shanker, I listened with great attention. Are you in support of Bill C-303?

Mr. Stuart Shanker: Yes, I am.

Mr. Michael Savage: Okay. Thank you very much.

Everybody here supports Bill C-303.

I'd like to ask a question, if I could, to CUPE first of all.

I support Bill C-303, but the concern I have is around the not-for-profit sector. I understand some amendments are coming from the proposer. I have a great concern about these commercial child care companies, these McDonald's of the child care business, coming into Canada and sweeping up.

On the other hand, I know an awful lot of good private child care facilities that exist would be grandfathered, but if they exist now, it means they might be able to exist in the future. Do you have any concern about possibly getting to the level of child care spaces we need if we don't allow some of those to be part of the new mix?

Ms. Jamie Kass: I think we've supported the CCAAC's position around grandfathering existing facilities. We understand that the small programs in child care are usually not making a profit, are in there trying to meet good-quality program standards. But all the research, including the new research by Gord Cleveland, again underscores the importance, if you're building a publicly funded system, of doing it in the non-profit system.

So when you see that there'll be an injection of public funding, then you clearly have to make sure that it's a non-profit system. We've really looked a lot at this. We had someone from Australia come on a cross-Canada tour. What they said to us was quite sobering—namely, that they opened up public funding in large ways to the commercial sector, and that child care sector now represents over 70% of the child care. It's meant that the small for-profits, including the non-profits, have closed their doors.

So what we've seen is that in fact it then will be open for those large commercial programs to come in. We think Bill C-303 is very important in that it focuses on the non-profit sector.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

To the CCAAC, Ms. Lysack and Ms. Dallaire, we all claim to be very interested in child care and in different methods as to how we think we need to create those spaces. The Conservatives indicated a promise in the campaign to create 125,000 spaces. Can you tell me how many, within the nearest thousand, have been created?

Ms. Monica Lysack (Executive Director, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada): Zero.

Mr. Michael Savage: That's a relatively precise number.

Ms. Monica Lysack: Not one space has been created under that.

Mr. Michael Savage: Well, they are still the new government. I guess maybe it takes a little bit of time to establish that.

One way in which the previous early learning and child care agreement was going to benefit Nova Scotia was that in Nova Scotia it was going to be used to provide better training for child care workers and also better wages. I had people suggest to me, "Look, we already have people working. Why would you want to just put money into the system and increase the wages?" But it's really unconscionable in this country that among the lowest-paid full-time workers are child care workers—and perhaps artists and other creative people as well.

Can you talk a little bit about how you think Bill C-303 might do something about training and wages for child care workers?

Ms. Monica Lysack: I'll start, and then Jody can jump in.

I think it's important to note that the new government was speaking to creating a number of spaces. But that doesn't recognize that the existing infrastructure is crumbling around us.

For example, the Alberta government made a new announcement this morning about child care. They're actually under capacity. It's not that they need new spaces, it's that the spaces they have can't even be put to use because they cannot support their child care workforce. Certainly the deputy minister from that province was very clear in meetings that investments had to be made in their workforce. That in fact is what they're doing with some of the money.

Maybe Jody could continue.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: In terms of the workforce, that's a reality not only in Nova Scotia but across all provinces. It's especially true in the province where I'm from, which is New Brunswick. We have some of the lowest training requirements in all of Canada because we have some of the lowest wages paid in all of Canada.

What the transfer of sustainable funds would mean for provinces where the workforce is underfunded, which is all of Canada, is that there would be some long-term planning. We could actually have benchmarks and timelines to improve the wages, to improve quality.

To return to the non-profit issue, in our province, 70% of our facilities are commercially run, but we have a dire need for rural child care in New Brunswick. All of our schools are empty. As we expand the system, we're looking in New Brunswick to expanding the non-profit sector.

•(1615)

Mr. Michael Savage: Okay.

I want to thank you for that. As I have said many times, we have in Canada many champions of child care, you among them, who have been so disappointed by this government in the last year and a half. It's a shame that a program, after so many years of wandering in the wilderness....

We had an idea, we had a plan, we put money into it, and it's been taken away for the \$100 a month that really does nothing to provide access. But I want to resist the urge to get political on that.

Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Thank you, Mr. Savage.

Up next, we have Madame Barbot.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, for being with us today.

I note that most of the groups are in favour of developing child care. I notice in particular that you expect some sort of coordination on the part of the federal government.

Mr. Dinsdale, you say that this poses certain problems for Amerindians. I would like to know whether you think that such programs are necessary in your communities and, if so, how they might be implemented in the current context.

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: I don't think there's any question the services are needed. In the brief we provided to the committee, we talked about the need for an early learning child care system. We were involved in some of the previous consultations leading up to this, and I certainly think it needs to occur more consistently and more effectively across the country.

The issue with Bill C-303, the way it sits today, is that it might not be the instrument we need to get to the aboriginal community. The tariff issue, the lack of jurisdictional coordination issue, and some of the access issues, we believe, are going to prevent a significant number of aboriginal people from truly accessing the program as they should.

I've heard that there's one amendment coming up on the profit thing. Hopefully someone is taking this to heart and is willing to look at it, because it's unimaginable that in the creation of a national system of early learning and child care there isn't contemplation of the challenges faced by Canada's aboriginal community.

And it's not going to get done, in our assessment, by the bill as currently constituted.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Do you think that some mechanisms or that some sort of organization might provide a bridge so that the bill could be reviewed in the light of your particular situation? So you would not be sidelined. Given the situation of children in your communities, such a program is all the more vital.

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Absolutely. In terms of suggesting people or organizations that should be involved, this committee has the resources at its disposal to talk to some of the leading experts in the field. As humble as we are, we'd welcome the opportunity to talk about how we believe urban aboriginal communities could access it if the bill were tweaked. Any time you talk about tariffs, in terms of the spirit of the bill—and I imagine some poverty groups have said the same thing to you—it is a significant barrier, irrespective of what that benchmark is. I think it's something that needs to be looked at seriously.

The jurisdictional challenges on first nations needs to be addressed. It's not currently in the field. It's an incredible tension for health and every other field. In the development of the new national standards, it would be prudent to take the time to figure out how they're going to navigate those at the outset. There are people

much more schooled and wiser than I who could advise on that, but I think that work needs to be done.

Finally, the issues around universality and accessibility are important issues of principle if this committee believes aboriginal children are at some sort of disadvantage in this country. In the creation of an early learning and child care system, which might help ameliorate those conditions, it would seem to make sense to include some concepts and how to ensure there's appropriate access, because equal access doesn't always mean equitable outcomes.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: You said that in the cities services should be provided to Amerindian children as a group, but where there are not enough of them could you envision these children receiving such care with other children?

[English]

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: In the design of these programs, there are always trade-offs in terms of access and accessibility. Even in the largest communities across Canada, there are significant aboriginal populations that would need day care spaces and facilities for 30 or so kids. It's a pretty small threshold that gets established in these programs. We're in 117 friendship centres in most communities with 500 aboriginal people or more, and in some of the smallest and largest communities in the country. There's no question there is a critical mass of people, in all of these communities, to access programs.

That being said, where it's prudent and makes sense, of course synergies and economies of scale need to be developed. But these kinds of trade-offs aren't even contemplated at this point, so it's difficult to have an esoteric conversation as to how we may in fact find a better delivery system when we are not even addressing the issue in the proposed bill.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Thank you very much, Ms. Barbot.

Now we have Ms. Chow, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Perhaps I may ask a question to either Monica or Jody regarding the multilateral framework agreements that each province is supposed to report out in public as to what's happening in their funding. After receiving the funding, what have they done with the child care money? And that has been in place for quite a few years now. When was the last time you saw a reporting out to the public from any of the provinces? Some may have.... Do you have any of those details?

Ms. Monica Lysack: Yes. For the year 2004-05, which is the year that ended two years ago, there are still eight jurisdictions, including the federal government, that have not yet filed public reports. Until this week there were absolutely no jurisdictions that had filed for 2005-06, which is a year ago, and one has since been posted.

So it's clear that governments signed on to the multilateral framework agreement, committing to public reporting, and yet almost all of the jurisdictions are two years behind.

Ms. Olivia Chow: And can the public do anything about that? They probably don't even know that they're supposed to report out and that their government has not said anything.

Ms. Monica Lysack: First of all, parents of young children are otherwise occupied with important things and don't spend a lot of time reading government reports. So when community members try to get this information for people like us who are concerned about this, there is nothing we can do. It's basically voluntary, so if the federal government continues to transfer funds despite the fact that no reporting has happened.... In fact, when we look at the expenditures in different provinces, even without official reports we know there's a great deal of public money that is going to one-off sorts of programs that are actually not getting any results.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Perhaps I may ask the question to Dr. Shanker. We know that a comprehensive flexible service that is child-centred, responsive to parents' needs, can come in different formats. It can be a family resource centre; it can be a toy library, child care, home care, after-school activities.

Is that the kind of flexibility you're looking for in a wrap-around service to children, so that they would be ready to learn by the age of five, for example? Today there is a Statistics Canada report that said children from poorer families are not as ready to learn as they enter into the school system, and one of the reasons is that they don't have as many opportunities to participate in group activities with their friends.

Is that an area you have focused on in the past?

• (1625)

Mr. Stuart Shanker: There are two aspects to your question, and the answer to the first is yes, absolutely, we love the kinds of wrap-around options that are available in a demonstration site like Toronto First Duty, particularly when, even in the case when parents are working and are dropping off their kids, programs are made available that suit the parents' times, where they too can have these experiences and pick up the kinds of skills we're talking about.

With regard to the second part of your question, we do study this very carefully, and we tried to explain this in the early years report that we published two weeks ago. We do see a gradient effect in our society, and by far the largest percentage of children with these problems are in the lowest socio-economic strata. Unfortunately, when we study this in terms of brain development we see significant lags. One of the most telling indicators we have is language development, and these children do lag significantly behind children from other sectors of society.

However, having said that, it is a problem that affects all sectors of society, and as I tried to point out before, the largest number of children, simply in terms of volume, come from the middle and upper classes. So it's not a problem that can be targeted, which is why we like Bill C-303. It is something that needs a universal approach.

Ms. Olivia Chow: In terms of the economic impact of children not being ready to learn, I believe there are various studies by economists that range from investing \$1 today and getting \$2 in results back or \$4, in a lot of disadvantaged communities. I've even seen \$7 in the U.S. study. Is that around the range of impact, for \$1

invested, that we would be able to get in economic productivity for the country, for example?

Mr. Stuart Shanker: It's an excellent question.

A conservative estimate now, developed recently by Jim Heckman at the University of Chicago, estimates \$8 saved for every dollar expended.

I will tell you one very interesting thing that Fraser Mustard has just done some research on. In all the studies that have been done so far, no one has factored in long-term health costs or mental health costs. When we factor in childhood depression, adolescent depression, and adolescent health problems, we estimate that the true cost may be double Heckman's estimates. It may be as much as \$16.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): That's all for your time.

We are going to go on to our Conservative members. We have Ms. Yelich and Mr. Chong splitting their time.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

We've all heard the testimony here today about the need for a national child care program, with the exception of that of Mr. Dinsdale, who had more of a nuanced argument. He argued that aboriginal Canadians have greater needs, and therefore a universal program that is providing equal access would not be the best design for aboriginal communities. And furthermore, as we all know, on-reserve child care is an *intra vires* federal responsibility.

I want to direct my questions to the other four groups appearing in front of us today. You've all argued for what some have termed a universal program. Others have called it a national program.

My first question is for the Rural Voices for Early Childhood Education and Care. You've argued that it's not socially responsible to leave it to the province or territory alone. So is it your view that a national child care program should include Canadians living in all 10 provinces? Or would it be acceptable to you to have the national—?

Ms. Carol Gott: Are you referring to Quebec?

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm asking if it is acceptable to have a program that would apply to Canadian citizens living in only eight or nine provinces.

Ms. Carol Gott: In terms of—and it's your term—a national program or universality, what we're asking for is national leadership. We're not arguing that it's a provincial-territorial jurisdictional issue. In fact, that's what allows us to respond to individual needs and diversity in communities across Canada.

•(1630)

Hon. Michael Chong: So what do you say to those—

Ms. Carol Gott: What we're arguing is that we won't remain a country on the issue unless we have federal leadership, and that in fact federal leadership, which includes measurable outcomes and definitions of access for communities, is what's going to allow us to get flexibility at the community level.

Hon. Michael Chong: What if it only applies to Canadians living in nine out of ten provinces? Is that acceptable to you? What do you say to Canadians—

Ms. Carol Gott: It's not. For Rural Voices, no, it's not acceptable, because our organization has people who are participating in every province and territory.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, I understand.

Thank you.

Ms. Carol Gott: So as Rural Voices, we certainly think it wouldn't be. As a Canadian, I think it would be a hell of a start.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for that answer.

I have a similar question for the members from CUPE.

Thank you very much for your testimony. It was very interesting.

What is your feeling on a national program? You've argued for a program that should be—you've actually used these words—a national child care system. Does that mean “national”, as in Canadians living in nine out of ten provinces, or as in Canadians living in all ten provinces?

Ms. Jamie Kass: We certainly would support it in all the provinces and territories, recognizing Quebec as a distinct society, and for aboriginal peoples. So we certainly would.

Our members live in every province across this country. So whether they work for municipalities, in health care, in homes for the aged, or with hydro, they need child care. So we're hearing it across the country. We hear it as a union that represents child care and early childhood educators, but also, we represent working people.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you very much for the answer to the question.

Just to finish off, that's one of the reasons we think the bill is flawed. Clause 4 of the bill exempts Quebec from this proposed program. In my view, Canadian citizens are Canadian citizens across the country, regardless of the province or the territory in which they live. It's a responsibility of a government to articulate on behalf of all Canadians living in all provinces. I feel quite strongly about that. So I think you've highlighted somewhat of a contradiction in this bill with regard to a national system that doesn't include Quebec.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): I would like to go back to Mr. Savage's remarks.

First of all, we do have a plan, and the plan was to address universality right off the bat, and \$100 went out to every child under the age of six, as of last July. So there was over \$1 billion put immediately into each and every child. That was your choice in child care, and it was universal.

The child care spaces were to be implemented starting in our budget in 2007, and that is what are working on, to create new spaces. It's started. We are giving money to the private sector to create spaces, but also to the provinces. We are dealing with the provinces to create spaces as well. On Thursday, the provinces all stated that they had created spaces very recently. I know Saskatchewan has created 500 spaces, whereas under the Liberal plan they didn't create spaces. We don't know what they did with the money, but they did not create spaces. Now they are, because that is part of the plan.

I must say, Mr. Dinsdale, I think this speaks to the bill. It's pretty hard for us to vote on it and to be in favour of this bill when it has left out a significant part of the population that it was meant to address, and this was part of the remarks of the author of the bill. She specifically said we must create spaces for the aboriginal people, and you have clearly showed us that it doesn't exist in this bill. Therefore, to support this bill would be supporting a bill that most people in the House must know they're not supporting on your behalf.

I want to talk about the section of the bill that talks about accountability, because that's what we're really talking about. It's not accountability.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): You have 10 seconds left.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: And this is the reporting aspect of it. The bill does say the providers must be non-profit, that the program is administered by the government of the province, it reports to the provincial government, and is subject to a public audit of its accounts.

So I want to know if any of you report to the provinces. As Mr. Dent said, he thought the demands of the reporting of the bill would be difficult for many of the child care outfits. Would you have to change your reporting, if you do report? Do you have any reporting mechanisms?

We're talking about accountability of the bill. It states that—

•(1635)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): I'm sorry, I'm going to have to cut you off because you're way over time. You'll have to answer in the next round.

We're going to be starting our second round. For five minutes, we have Mr. Merasty.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Thanks, Madam Chair.

The first question is more to Mr. Dinsdale at this point. From what I understand, there is an amendment coming forward on the aboriginal issue, more specifically. One of the concerns I've had is this. I've heard recently there are potentially going to be cuts and rollbacks to the ECIP, or early childhood intervention program, and the head start program, combined with the lack of child care spaces currently out there. I'm hoping the amendment will speak to some of these concerns.

The issue I hear from my community and across Canada is that the aboriginal population is the only population that's having a huge baby boom, and there seems to be a choking of resources—I don't mean that intentionally. It is really bottlenecking. Less and less funding is going into providing early childhood spaces, and there are potentially some rollbacks from Indian Affairs and from Health on Head Start, Brighter Futures, and ECIP.

What do you think the impact will be? Dr. Shanker talked about the long-term impact, not just psychologically but for all these others, because of that lack. To me, it's potentially very detrimental if those investments aren't immediately channelled into this baby boom. I wonder if you can expand a bit more on your five points, very briefly, on why that investment is so necessary.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: I obviously was strong in my comments and I probably surprised some by the strength of them in criticizing the bill. It's because I think it is so critical that we get this right at the outset, because it would be leaving such a significant portion out.

We certainly support the bill. With the current process that's in place, we aren't seeing the aboriginal community benefiting. We aren't seeing aboriginal day cares opening up with the \$100 a month. We aren't seeing those kinds of things happening. The plans simply are not reaching our communities, and neither would this one. That was our concern.

The head start program has been incredibly vital. We have 20 urban aboriginal head start programs across the country. These head start programs are having tremendous impact on the young. Our communities do not have a culture of learning right now. Half of our people are dropping out of high school. Imagine in your riding and in your family, if half the people didn't graduate from high school, the kind of national outcry there would be.

The head start program is one of the few programs that are having a tremendous impact in giving these young kids a head start, and it's having tremendous impact. The parents are involved in the communities. The teaching is happening. It's an incredible thing. This could add to that. The head start programs are in addition to the child day care spaces I talked about, but they certainly are a complementary strategy in terms of having these head start programs where kids are coming in and learning.

So I hope my comments and the strength with which I present them aren't being misconstrued to suggest that we don't support the bill or that the bill should be....

I'm hoping that in our strong language you'll see the areas where we think amendments need to be made in order to ensure that our community has proper access, and I think cutting the head start program back would be a tremendous detriment to the community

and the kind of momentum that's occurring in a lot of these agencies right now.

Mr. Gary Merasty: You see, I'm caught in a bit of a tough place, because the current Conservative plan basically ignores the aboriginal communities. It's just not going to happen.

I, of course, was concerned about this bill when it first came out. The amendments will hopefully speak to the concerns that were raised, but those same concerns also exist in my riding, a rural riding, with economically marginalized infrastructure, and we have small, private home operators. They're the only ones who can exist. They're not necessarily not-for-profit, but we need them.

That was my other concern about this bill as well, when it came to those two issues. I'm wondering if you could speak to what we actually should be doing with the amendments that are being talked about to protect the not-for-profits and the small operators.

Ms. Carol Gott: Certainly in our work in developing the national strategy paper, which again included people who both provide and operate child care from every province and territory, we spent a long time on the non-profit/for-profit issue.

From a rural perspective, we don't have the same concerns of big-box child care coming in. They're just not going to come. But we also know that the very best child care, the very best solutions, have been developed around a non-profit base that allows different sectors of the community, well beyond the child care sector, to work together for the benefit of families and children, and that's very difficult from a for-profit base.

So even the people who were for-profit operators, within the context of that national strategy paper, eventually supported the notion that we brought forward in the paper of grandfathering for-profit centres that are there now, but certainly directing the limited funding to developing much more community-based, much more inclusive non-profit centres and solutions—not centres, because certainly we looked at home child care. We looked at, as I said, a whole continuum of service.

But it's really important. If we are going to dovetail with education, if we are going to work together with health, we need to do that from a community base, from a non-profit base.

• (1640)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Thank you.

We now go on, for another five minutes, to Mr. Lessard, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I found the discussion between Mr. Dinsdale and Mr. Merasty quite interesting. To make sure the bill is equitable for everyone, we would almost have to go to two extremes.

The Aboriginal peoples' situation shows that their conditions in terms of services are such that special provisions should be made at all times. That is the case here and that is to be expected. It is something that has to be done. I think that, if we manage to do so, eventually we will come up with some provisions enabling us to reach everyone. The people from Rural Voices for Early Childhood Education and Care can give us their opinion on this. If we can reach Aboriginal people, it seems to me that we will succeed in reaching other communities. This exercise should be one of generosity and not pettiness. We must avoid saying, for example, that one group in Quebec is receiving services and that this is not right because we have not yet got these services ourselves, and, if we cannot have services, these services should not be offered to another group. There is something unhealthy about that sort of thing and ideological positions...

When our friend Mr. Chong tells us that the Conservatives' policies are very generous regarding more vulnerable communities, I do not understand. Indeed, the Kelowna Accord, in spite of its imperfections, was very positive. They are the ones who got rid of it. I do not want to turn this into a political issue, but we have to be clear with one another. We must not make any mistakes here; we have to tell it like it is.

Your last comments, Mr. Dinsdale, clarified the question more for me. A statement was made at the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, with whom you probably have some connections. The statement said that Bill C-303 contained some shortcomings pertaining to Aboriginal peoples, but by wording clause 8 so as to specify the particularities of Aboriginal peoples, there could be a positive outcome. The bill would be more effective and Aboriginal peoples could support it more readily. I would like to hear your comments in this regard. If by chance you have not given some thought to this question, you could send us your comments later.

I also very much enjoyed the contribution by the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. I did not have time to consult your report, which looks quite rich, as do all the others, moreover.

I am going to conclude with an example, Madam Chair. When child care services were set up in Quebec in 1997, I was part of it. I worked on it, and my colleague too. We did not achieve perfection the first year, nor has it been achieved yet. This system serves as a model. We dared to do something. It remains that for many years the educators working within this system were paid less than zoo employees. This is the sort of thing that has been improved over time.

We could restrict ourselves to defending our own child care system so that it does not become vulnerable, but what we really want is for all of you everywhere in the country to have a good system. We are going to lend our support to one another and this way this kind of intervention will not make our system vulnerable.

I apologize for not leaving time for an answer.

• (1645)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): There's a minute and a half for a response.

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: Thank you for the question.

Two of my five concerns were in reference to clause 8, around indicators of availability, and the spelling out there, perhaps, of indicators of accessibility. There would be two ways to look at it. I think you still need to make sure that the on-reserve dilemma and the jurisdictional issues are addressed, and that might take more thinking. I'm glad I'm not in your moccasins...I don't know if that translates well. I'm glad I'm not in your shoes, because those things are not going to be easy.

I think the tariff issue is also fundamental. As much as it is an issue of aboriginal access, hopefully the same issue has been raised by some poverty groups. If you are making minimum wage or barely above it, if you are an aboriginal woman with a child, if you managed to get through high school and are working somewhere, and you need child care, and you are asked to pay the average wage for that, I guarantee you your wage is not the average wage.

If we want these young women to be successful and to have quality, accessible, affordable—to use the previous language—child care spaces that are culturally relevant, that are going to help her child finish and graduate as well, then I think we need to turn our attention to it. And I think the tariff is a huge barrier.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Is there anything else? You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: I would like to thank you for your remarks. It is true that the Quebec system is the envy of the other provinces. Despite all the possible imperfections, we would like the government to show leadership, to establish a timetable and to make long-term investments.

I am very worried when I hear that a provision recognizing that Quebec has already implemented its own child care services might result in the other provinces not being able to set up their own, particularly since Quebec was recently recognized in the House of Commons as a nation. I find that both very worrisome and contradictory.

Mr. Yves Lessard: The gentleman in question did not recognize it. He even resigned as a minister so as not to recognize it.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: But the fact remains.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): We're not going to open up that debate, because we'd be here a lot longer.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: This is a question of democracy. Is he going to align himself with the decision of the House?

I do not know much about it, but I think that he will.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): I'm going to take it over to Ms. Chow, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Olivia Chow: The sponsor of the bill, Madame Savoie, said in the beginning that there would be two amendments. The first one is to amend it to “provide as family child care services by an individual authorized under the provincial or territorial law to do so.” That is specifically in there to ensure the greatest amount of flexibility, so that in rural areas, for example, it wouldn't be one-size-fits-all. It could be the time, or it could be part-time or transportation issues. Any number of things could operate from a home base. As long as it's regulated, we know there will be a certain standard.

So that amendment should take care of some of the concerns people have talked about.

The second amendment we talked about a few meetings ago was on aboriginal child care—precisely what Mr. Dinsdale was talking about. I think there is a discussion going on between Mr. Alfred Gay, of the aboriginal congress, and other groups that are interested in aboriginal child care issues on the best way to make the amendments. Is it through amending the accessibility part, the accountability question, or the question of payment or tariff, without going over the jurisdictional problem? After all, it is really the province that determines this. But if it is on the reserve, how would that fit?

The original draft of the bill made the assumption that because this bill was very broad, in general it would deal with the needs of the aboriginal community. But spelling it out very clearly might be even better, because it is very clear on children with special needs, for example, so why not other areas? That is coming in the amendment. I just want to make sure people know that.

Having said all that, I would welcome—and so would other members—suggestions on how best to amend it so we do not violate the jurisdiction question, but also answer the fear, which I totally understand. Certainly we do not want any child left behind if we can put a bill together.

Perhaps folks here have some suggestions. Welcome to our process. We are planning to do the amendments on May 10, so there are not a lot of questions. There have been quite a few discussions already in the community, but we don't know the precise wording yet.

Is there any response on that?

• (1650)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): You have a minute and a half.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Is there any response? No.

I want to come back to the farming communities. There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding. I hear—especially from the Conservative members of Parliament in the House of Commons—every time we debate child care, the argument that it's always about urban centres and doesn't deal with farming communities. My experience tells me that whether it's the seeding or whatever, in many families both parents are working to support the farm in some way.

So perhaps you can describe your experience on how it works in some communities. Lay it out and describe what that child care looks like.

Ms. Carol Gott: I'll take a few minutes and then I will let Jane continue.

We both come from rural communities. I live on a hundred acres outside a small hamlet called Feversham. It is a farming community, and 20 years ago it had no services within about an hour's drive. It was part of a region that took an hour to cross, top to bottom and side to side, that in fact had no services. It was a large rural region without a city or a town within it.

Through a very active community process that involved all sectors of the community, we not only developed child care options, we developed quality child care options, some of those being centre-based in communities as small as 300 children, which, when working in partnership and in an integrated way with other services in the community, have served those families and children very well and have been there for over 20 years. Not only are they sustainable; they continue to grow and to focus on the changing needs of families and children in their communities and the surrounding area.

Although that probably seldom happens across Canada, there certainly are examples in other provinces and territories as well.

I'll let Jane say a few things about her community as well.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): We have 30 seconds, so let's wrap it up.

Ms. Jane Wilson (Co-Manager, Rural Voices for Child Care): My home community has a population of 90 people. We've had a regulated, licensed child care program there with quality care for almost 20 years. We've expanded into six neighbouring communities through the integrated hub model. We have provided child care to over 250 children through sharing spaces and services, with one common board of directors throughout the region—so that our volunteers don't burn out—from six different communities. We have won the Prime Minister's award of excellence for child care.

Rural child care is possible. Our smallest community is 90; our largest is 450. Rural quality child care is totally and completely viable, sustainable, and doable—and much needed.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1655)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Thank you.

We're going to go on for five minutes to Mr. Lake, please.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): I want to start with the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. My first question is for Ms. Dallaire.

Actually, first I want to make a comment. I noted a bit of a change of tone today and a sort of focus on common ground. In your comments, you talked about all federal parties agreeing that we're concerned about the best outcomes for our kids. We can definitely share that common ground; we do agree. We may disagree on how to get there, but we agree that this is important.

I want to ask you a little bit about universality. Ms. Savoie came before the committee and stated that 54% was her benchmark for universality. I'm curious what your benchmark for universality would be.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: It is spelled out in more detail in the package we submitted, in our policy recommendations “From Patchwork to Framework”. What we are advocating for is a range of programs where I believe it's 50% that are designated full-time spaces. The rest are according to families' needs: either drop-in centres, part-time services—

Mr. Mike Lake: What percentage of the zero-to-six population should be in child care? What should our target be?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: I don't necessarily believe children should be in child care. I believe that parents who want to choose child care as an option should have that option, so we need to factor in enough spaces that, for families who are actually choosing and where the parents are working, the spaces are available.

Mr. Mike Lake: Are those fully funded spaces?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: They would carry a parent user fee for parents who can afford it; and for the parents who cannot afford it, that fee would be waived.

Mr. Mike Lake: One of the things Ms. Savoie said when she was before us is a direct quote about this bill, that:

actually, it involves no cost other than what is being funded now.... [R]ight now there is money going to the provinces, and the program could start exactly on the amount of money that exists today.
...it could be the basis for the law today, with no additional funding....

Do you agree that we don't require any additional funding?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Ideally there would be additional funding to actually start building child care in the provinces, but my understanding from the bill is that there is no funding requirement; that it would apply to existing funds; and that as we move forward and invest new funds, they would need to be invested according to those parameters.

Mr. Mike Lake: Then in clause 7 of the bill, it says that “...all or a portion of any child care transfer payment to that province or territory for the following fiscal year be withheld.” It basically says the only thing this legislation would do is give the federal government the ability to take back the money. It doesn't actually give any extra money. The option that this bill seems to provide, as I'm reading it, is no more funding, and maybe less.

Do you think that's a good idea?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: If the provinces aren't meeting their obligations under the agreement, that could mean the funding—

Mr. Mike Lake: The funding would be withheld at that point.

I was interested to hear Mr. Savage's comments. I think he's finally come around a bit, because he referred to the Liberal record as “so many years of wandering in the wilderness”. I thought that was interesting.

I want to talk a bit about that. The Liberal government was in power for almost 13 years, wandering in the wilderness. You worked with them and you lobbied them, yet no legislation was ever passed or even created. Can you tell me why not? Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: I didn't realize that question was directed to us, unfortunately.

Ms. Monica Lysack: I'd have to look back on this, but I think the number of spaces in the country has actually doubled since 1994.

Mr. Mike Lake: It's interesting that one of you mentioned pretty emphatically that the number was zero when asked how many spaces have been created since our government took power. Where exactly do you get the measurement from? How can you actually say so emphatically that zero child care spaces have been created? Can you tell me what the research is behind that?

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: It's based on the child care spaces initiative. This year a committee was appointed to study the best way to actually create the spaces, but none of that money has actually been invested to create any new spaces.

● (1700)

Mr. Mike Lake: We have information showing that even just for three provinces right now, there are 2,500; Ontario committed to creating 15,000. Of course, there was the announcement in Alberta today.

How do you propose that you're going to be...? I imagine you'll be following pretty closely with a strict measurement scheme to determine exactly how many spots have been created. Can you describe that measurement mechanism for me, please?

Ms. Monica Lysack: It is actually getting pretty tricky to follow all of the accountability around the investments, isn't it? It is a great challenge to us. We have been trying to track the transfers, going back to—

Mr. Mike Lake: But you were pretty emphatic in your last answer.

Ms. Monica Lysack: Yes, I'll get to that. You asked about the mechanisms; I'll explain the mechanism and tell you how we got to it.

Mr. Mike Lake: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): You have a minute.

Mr. Mike Lake: Thank you.

Ms. Monica Lysack: I'll try to be quick.

We went back to the beginning of the multilateral agreements and we've been tracking the federal transfers and tracking provincial investments. It gets a little fuzzy, although I do want to say that.... So there are federal funds that have been transferred—

Mr. Mike Lake: It sounds as though we're not getting to an answer, and I have some other questions.

Ms. Monica Lysack: There are federal funds that have been transferred that have not yet been invested by the provinces.

Mr. Mike Lake: I have a question for CUPE, actually, because I've only got one minute left.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): You have 30 seconds now.

Mr. Mike Lake: I'd like to ask CUPE a quick question. What is the percentage of not-for-profit workers who are unionized? Actually, I'll get the second one in too: what percentage of for-profit workers—or maybe they would be called “private” or “non-not-for-profit” workers—are unionized?

Ms. Shellie Bird: Approximately 12% of the child care sector is unionized across the country. I'm not quite sure how it breaks down in other provinces between for-profit and non-profit.

Mr. Mike Lake: So you don't know the number of not-for-profit versus private day care workers who are unionized?

Ms. Shellie Bird: No.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Thank you, Mr. Lake.

If we can please wrap it up and keep to three minutes, then we should all be able to get in a quick other round.

I have Mr. Savage, who I'm sure is very anxious to respond.

Mr. Michael Savage: I am very happy to debate the Liberal record versus the Conservative record at any point in time, but it would be an unfair argument.

Mr. Chong raises an interesting question when he talks about a national program and whether you can have a national program when one province is excluded. When Mr. Chong talks about this he speaks from principle, and he has exercised his principle in a way that none of the rest of us have had the opportunity to do, so I admire that. But we do need to keep in mind that Quebec is the model for what the rest of us are trying to get to. In essence, the program already exists in Quebec.

When we talk about child care these days, it seems to me the question at the very basic level is, do we believe that as a country, as provinces and territories, and hopefully including our aboriginal people, we should invest directly in creating spaces? Is that the role of government, or should we give money to people so they can take care of their own? In other words, maybe in health care, we should get rid of the health care system and give people money and say, you're on your own; the private sector will build it, and maybe we'll provide a little tax incentive.

That doesn't make any sense to me. Even if it did, I don't think \$100 a month would buy an awful lot of child care.

The reason I raise this is that this is a very fundamental question. How do we provide child care? The UN convention from 1948 indicated that education was a right, not a privilege. It didn't specifically say primary school education. We're now getting to the point where we should have discussions about post-secondary education as well, and we are having a discussion about early learning and child care.

My question is for everybody on the panel. Do you think that giving \$100 a month, or any specific amount of money, to parents of children under six will actually make spaces more accessible in this country?

Anybody who wants to can answer that.

Ms. Carol Gott: We know that \$100 a month does not create child care. And certainly we work in rural, remote, and northern communities all across Canada, where even with this \$100 a month going to every child of the appropriate age in the community, they're still losing ground, not gaining ground. We're doing extensive work in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. We work with the Nisga'a First Nation in B.C. We work in Port-Au-Port, Newfoundland. All those communities are struggling, yet they have this \$100 in their hands.

It is a wonderful income support, and certainly from our national think tank we would be the first to say, much like in aboriginal communities and impoverished rural communities, we welcome the

\$100 a month. It is not a national child care program. It does not create opportunities or options for child care for Canadian families.

• (1705)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Perhaps we could have the rest of the witnesses answer in 20 seconds, then everyone will get a quick say. Could we go around the table?

Mr. Peter Dinsdale: It doesn't create child care spaces for aboriginal people. I have two children. I receive \$200 a month. That buys diapers and formula.

Ms. Shellie Bird: It's unfortunate that the debate in our country has pitted the needs of working families against the needs of stay-at-home families. It's an unfortunate state that our leaders would allow the needs of children to be pitted against each other, the needs of families to be pitted against each other. What families are saying they need is a national child care program.

We also need to support families who stay at home. I think we are a wealthy nation and can afford to do both.

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: Our position is that we need a range of programs. We need income supports for families and we also need a range of quality child care programs with clear accountability measures to make sure that each dollar invested actually goes to the right place to make spaces affordable, quality, and accessible.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Lessard, for three minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is addressed to each and every one of you, perhaps more specifically to the Association of Canada...

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): I'm sorry, Mr. Lessard, I have to let Mr. Brown go for three minutes, then I'll come back to you. My apologies.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Since he did not speak, I thought he could have six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): I'll have to get my points in quickly. I didn't realize there were just three minutes.

To start, someone mentioned there were no new child spaces created since the government took office. I'd note that recorded so far in Nova Scotia there are 1,550; in Saskatchewan, 500; in Manitoba, 500. The recent Ontario budget committed 15,000 spaces, and obviously there are going to be more provincial budgets coming out. Those are the data in four provinces. It's exciting to see some progress happening.

I'd note that in my native province of Ontario the government there was given \$97.5 million from the Government of Canada—for those who might be confused about governments. The Government of Ontario chose to spend only \$25 million because they believed that was enough in terms of the needs of child care.

So I have some concerns about assuring that child care dollars are spent...and I worry that this bill may actually freeze child care money, because we are going to have provinces that don't support terms of universality. For example, in Quebec, we understand, their model is about 50%. Ms. Savoie said 54% should be the benchmark. So I do have some concerns about that.

A larger concern with the bill is that it sees the solution as requiring no new resources. That's something that I think some of the people making suggestions today would have concerns with.

Where the problem started in Canada, and I think most of us would agree, was back in 1993, when many Canadians believed there was an issue of child care. The Liberal Party made a platform commitment, and then they cut child care funding. They cut social transfers to the provinces by \$25 billion. My concern with no new funding is, what happens if we see the Liberal Party elected again and they look for ways, as they did in 1993, to take away from child care? Could they use this act to limit child care funding?

The question I want to get out is whether you agree that no new funding...as Ms. Savoie has outlined and as seems to be supported by the Liberal Party, and certainly the premier, who's searched for opportunities in Ontario to cut funding for child care. Do you agree with the sentiment that no new funding is required?

I'm excited about the mood we've had in Ottawa of late, where the Conservatives have tripled funding for child care—tripled in terms of what the Liberals actually promised—and that's a fact, \$5.6 billion.

Are you in favour of the Conservative model of increasing funds in child care or are you in favour of the status quo argument, which is to say no new funding is available, let's forget about the Conservative course to triple it, as we have?

• (1710)

Ms. Shellie Bird: I think there's some confusion. What has happened is that under the bilateral agreement between Ontario and the federal government, the provincial government had accepted the quad principles: quality, universal, affordable, and developmental. They were using their funding under that agreement to build 25,000 spaces. When the Conservative government came to power and cancelled those agreements, and cancelled the funding with them, they were able to build only 15,000 spaces with that money that had come from the child care agreement.

So none of the money you're talking about under the space creation initiative has created any spaces in Ontario, because no money has come to the Province of Ontario under this new initiative —

Mr. Patrick Brown: The \$97.5 million was just released. I appreciate your recognizing—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Mr. Brown, let the witness finish, please.

Ms. Shellie Bird: The \$97 million is the end of the funding under the provincial child care agreement. That's the end of the funding, that's not the new funding.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): I'm going to turn it over to Mr. Lessard, for three minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard: I will say very briefly that there is a cost involved and that it is society's choice. We make the choice, yes or no, and that costs something. In Quebec, it costs \$1.5 billion a year. Relatively speaking, in Canada, we can already estimate what it is going to cost. It is a choice, like the one made to dedicate \$17.5 billion to military equipment. This is a choice that was made without any consultation, without any debate like the one we are having right now about children. It is a special choice, therefore.

My question is addressed to each of you, but perhaps more particularly to the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. I have perused your briefs, and they do not look to me to be complete enough. This comment is not directed only at you, though. As far as the development of private businesses is concerned, one aspect of the bill gives me some sense of security, and it is the fact that the door has been closed on the later development of private day care centres.

In Quebec, there is a moratorium on private day care centres. Those that already exist are also subject to rules of quality, accessibility and universality. They are highly controlled. When the legislation was amended, it was noted that the for-profit day care organizations were watching very closely. As soon as the Quebec government amended the act last year, in two locations, Sherbrooke and Montreal's South Shore, two large American organizations were watching like hawks. Do you consider that this bill has what it takes to guarantee our safety regarding commercialization of the system? If not, what is this bill lacking?

[*English*]

Ms. Jamie Kass: I do think we have what we need in this bill to assure that if we create a universally accessible system, it won't be in the for-profit sector. This is really important, because I think, with this bill, over the years we will see new funding coming into the system in terms of creating universality and that it won't be in the for-profit sector.

I want to underscore that for many of us who have worked in pushing for this kind of program for most of our working lives, to see a national child care program recognizing Quebec's distinct nature, if we see it come about in the for-profit sector, we would not want it.

When you look at what happened in Australia, you see that 70% of their system now is operated by big commercial child care, and we've seen the interest already coming in from U.S. for-profits and some Canadian homegrown for-profit organizations coming in. What they're interested in is the public funding. And they won't operate in rural areas; they won't open their premises to children with diverse needs and inclusive needs; they won't be in aboriginal communities. They'll probably be in very wealthy areas where they then have large amounts of public funding coming into those programs.

So I really caution you all that ensuring that it's a non-profit delivery is really critical.

• (1715)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): You have 30 seconds, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Jody Dallaire: I would like to add that, in the province of New Brunswick, where I am from, a day care organization contacted our provincial government because the latter wants to develop a long-term child care services plan. The for-profit organizations are therefore watching very closely. I wish to say that we also believe that the bill deals with these concerns and that it will prevent an invasion of the market by the day care organizations. Furthermore, it will mean that the public money invested in future to set up a universal system will go to the public through the creation of places for everyone.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Thank you.

Ms. Chow, for three minutes, please.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Chair, I have letters from parents from Victoria, Vancouver, Halifax, Toronto, London, Prince Rupert, Kingston, Nanaimo, Fergus, Fort St. John, Calgary, and Duncan. I just want to make sure that it is in your record and people will know that we are getting a lot of letters in support of it.

I'm wondering if any of you have been around long enough to recall that in the late 1980s or early 1990s there was a movement to draft a national child care act by the then Prime Minister, who was Brian Mulroney. Would any of you recall the details of that? We may not have enough time for that.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Could we keep it to a minute, please, because the government has one more opportunity to ask a question. We have a minute, if you want to answer quickly.

Ms. Jamie Kass: Some of us were certainly around to work on that act. I'm sure we can find it in the filing cabinet, with all the other reports.

I think this is a well-crafted act overall. I think we need to address the aboriginal issues and we want to ensure that it's inclusive of family child care, but I actually think the basis of the act is very good.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Mr. Chong can speak for three quick minutes, and then we'll wrap up the meeting.

Hon. Michael Chong: I will briefly reiterate my concerns about this bill, which I highlighted earlier.

It's not inconceivable that there could be a new government in Quebec. It's a minority government—my wife's family is from Quebec—and the point is that it's not inconceivable that a future government in Quebec could radically alter the delivery of their child care system. As it's presently structured, this act would do nothing to prevent that. In other words you're creating a situation that ties into what Peter Dinsdale mentioned: you don't have a so-called national program that applies to all Canadians. That, for me, is a big problem. Programs that are designed by the federal government, I believe—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): Mr. Chong, did you have a question? We only have thirty seconds left.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'll get my point in. I don't think there's a question there. I want to make a comment, as well.

Further to what Mr. Brown has said, we've allocated \$5.6 billion to Canadian families. I think the question really is—and I know you're shaking your head—about the allocation of that money. I think your contention is that it shouldn't be allocated amongst all families equally, that it should be specifically targeted toward a certain subset of families. I think what we're trying to say is that we want to make sure everybody gets treated equally, regardless of their choice.

Obviously we are agreeing to disagree on some of those things. The fact of the matter is that there is three times more money going to Canadian families now than there was under the Liberal government.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): *Merci beaucoup.*

There are times when I wish I wasn't chair, but since I am and I have to be neutral, I want to thank all of the witnesses on behalf of all MPs and committee members. Your information was most valuable.

We're going to call the meeting to a close. We have votes in the House.

Thank you. This meeting is adjourned.

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