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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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● (0905)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Ruby Dhalla): I would like to call the meeting to order.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of our witnesses for coming in today. Your perspective and your experiences will provide us with great insight.

Pursuant to the order of reference of November 22, 2006, the committee will now resume its study on Bill C-303.

We are going to be having two panels. We have our first panel sitting in front of us today. After the first panel has finished, we will be deliberating on a few motions that are before our committee, and at that point we will suspend very briefly as we get set for the second panel. We will have individuals join us for the second panel.

I think in light of the timing and the number of witnesses today, we will probably take Mr. Lake's suggestion and use the discretion of the chair and have questioning for five-minute periods.

We will have Mr. Dean Allison, who is the chair of the committee, join us a little later.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our witnesses.

You may begin.

[Translation]

Ms. Claudette Pitre-Robin (Administrator, Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance): Good morning. My name is Claudette Pitre-Robin, and I represent the Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance [Quebec association of early childhood centres]. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for accepting to hear our views on this bill.

The Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance agrees with Bill C-303, since clause 4 enables Quebec to continue its child care services program. We feel that it would have been truly unfortunate if this clause had not been in the bill, as it is important to us to be able to continue in the same direction, as Quebec has done over the past decade in developing child care services.

We currently have 200,000 child care spaces at \$7 per day. Recent election commitments have led us to believe that another 20,000 spaces would be added to meet the needs of families. We feel that it is important for the Quebec government to be able to continue this approach. We are also pleased that during the course of

the coming year, we should not be required to increase the current \$7 fee paid by parents.

We do not have a specific brief to support our comments today, but I have taken excerpts from documents that, unfortunately, are not translated. I have left copies on the table at the back. It is a document that we worked on a few months ago to report on public investment in the early childhood development centre network and which shows the impact of these measures in Quebec.

The Quebec government currently invests \$1.5 billion in the educational child care services network. That is just under 3% of the government's budget, but in our view, this investment pays huge dividends, economically and socially, and allows for the provision of universal services.

Economically speaking, we were able to measure the important contribution of the early childhood development centres network to economic activity and development in Quebec, as well as the savings generated in terms of long-term social costs.

We also determined that it led to an increase in gross domestic product. In Quebec, the level of economic activity by women of child-bearing age increased by 9% from 1996 to 2005. That increase is twice as high as in the rest of Canada. It means almost 90,000 more women in the workforce, women who are more financially independent and who have often been able to leave a life of poverty.

This has also had a very positive impact on GDP in Quebec and provides an extremely important contribution to the activities of Quebec companies, especially given the imminent shortage of skilled workers.

A Quebec economist, Ruth Rose, did a cost-benefit analysis study of a universal preschool educational program for the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation. She was able to estimate the return on investment for each dollar put into educational child care services in Quebec. Bear in mind that the Quebec government pays 80% of the cost and the parents, 20%.

The document shows many other savings, but I am going to simply tell you about the immediate impact. We have seen a reduction in social assistance spending, since mothers can work, an increase in direct income tax linked to the salaries of the mothers, and there was also job creation in child care, which broadened the tax base.

The federal government also made significant gains, which result mainly from an improved tax base and a reduction in the use of employment insurance.

It is also a critical tool for fighting poverty and social exclusion because it provides affordable educational services of high quality to families, regardless of their socio-economic or geographical situation, because development is done in an equitable fashion in all regions of Quebec.

It also enhances access to the labour market or to education for mothers. It plays a preventative role for children in vulnerable situations. It supports parents in their parental role. It also makes it possible to integrate children with special needs.

We have seen the importance, for children, of increasing income, especially in single-parent families. Poverty indicators produced by Statistics Canada show a spectacular decline, in Quebec, in the number of single-parent families facing poverty where women are the heads of the household, whereas the decrease Canada-wide, although it is significant, is much lower.

• (0910)

According to statistics, in 1997 in Canada, 53% of female-led lone parent families were living below the low-income cutoff, whereas in 2004, it was 40%, or 13% lower. In Quebec, the rate was 60% in 1997 and 30% in 2004, or 30% lower. So there was a 50% reduction in the number of poor single-parent women in Quebec. That is significant, and it is truly one of the fantastic objectives of this policy. Quebec's family policy has therefore had a major impact on the incidence of poverty among children and especially in lone-parent families. We cannot stress enough that this is about supporting the development of all children and that for them, it is a protection factor, especially for those living in a context of vulnerability. You all know that the majority of studies on this topic show that children from under-privileged backgrounds benefit immensely from their child care experience.

As regards universality, social equity is at the heart of the \$7-a-day child care network, and often, there is a lot of criticism. On the one hand, if we recognize that it is an essential service, that means that it must be universal. The current system is such that everyone contributes to supporting the family, since a portion of the expenditures are paid by the government. We are asked why parents with higher incomes benefit from spaces at \$7. Through the tax system, families that are more well-off are already paying more than \$7. Facts show that once tax contributions are applied, parents that are more well-off pay more than \$7, as taxpayers in the highest tax bracket account for 60% of individual income tax.

• (0915)

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Sorry to interrupt, but you have 30 seconds left.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Claudette Pitre-Robin: If you look at our documents, you will see that families in the highest bracket pay, because of income

tax, \$16.60 per day, whereas families in lower tax brackets pay \$7.30 per day. So you see the impact taxes have.

Moreover, we looked at the situation of families with similar incomes. For example, a family without children with employment income of \$82,383 would have an after-tax income \$59,113. If it is a couple with two teenagers, the after-tax income would be \$61,280. If it were a couple with two children, where the mother does not work and the income is provided by a single parent, it is \$59,901. If the parents of the two children are both in the workforce, it is \$59,057. We see that families with a single income have the same income and are better off, even if they do not have access to the \$7-a-day child care spaces, as a result of other tax measures.

That is the data that we wanted to share with you this morning. Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you.

If you have anything else left, we can perhaps take care of it during questions.

I would please ask all of the witnesses just to keep to our timing. It's because we do only seven-minute presentations, and we have a number of witnesses.

I would next like to go to Ms. Rothman and Ms. Martha Friendly. Ms. Rothman is the national coordinator for Campaign 2000, and Ms. Friendly is a member of the steering committee.

Ms. Laurel Rothman (National Coordinator, Campaign 2000): Thank you.

Good morning. Thanks for the opportunity to talk with you today.

Campaign 2000 is a broad anti-poverty coalition. It's a cross-Canada coalition, founded in 1991, of more than 120 organizations to promote and secure the full implementation of the unanimous 1989 House of Commons resolution to eliminate child poverty in Canada. Clearly we've not achieved that by the year 2000, but we continue to urge all governments to keep their commitments and meet their obligations.

We're a diverse range of partner organizations in every province and territory, including low-income people's groups, parents' groups, child care providers and advocates, housing and health care providers and advocates, unions, women's groups, social planning councils, food banks, teachers, social workers, faith communities, aboriginal groups, and groups representing immigrants and refugees. Our partners in early learning and child care services include the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada; the Canadian Child Care Federation; the Childcare Resource and Research Unit; SpecialLink, the National Centre for Child Care Inclusion; and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, to name a few. There will be a list of partners with the brief we submit.

Since our inception we have been committed to a balance of income supports and high-quality community services that are essential and that evidence indicates are needed to significantly reduce and eradicate child and family poverty and improve the life chances of all children. We seek to raise public awareness and to bring to light evidence-based and reasonable policy solutions. We meet with all levels of government, and we're non-partisan.

Martha is going to address some other aspects of the situation.

We're here to support the legislation, Bill C-303. We're very much in agreement with the perspective that child care services must be accessible for all children, not only low-income children. At the same time, a real system of high-quality and accessible child care services is an essential cornerstone of a poverty reduction strategy. I might add that the experience in Quebec, the only province where the child and family poverty rate has continuously gone down since 1997, is illustrative. I think we have to look at it. Perhaps we can talk about that later.

From our point of view, universality means that when a full system has been developed, all children will have access to good services if their parents choose it, whether they're urban or rural, low income, middle income, or well-to-do, have a mother in the paid labour force, or they're aboriginal, Québécois, or a newcomer to the country.

There are a number of reasons we feel that the best way to meet the early learning and child care needs of low-income children is within a universally accessible system. Martha is going to address that.

Thank you.

• (0920)

Ms. Martha Friendly (Member, Steering Committee, Campaign 2000): Thank you.

I'm the coordinator of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, and I'm a national partner of Campaign 2000 and a member of the steering committee.

I want to talk first about a couple of the main reasons that a universal system is really the best way to address the early learning and child care needs of children living in poverty.

First of all, poverty is dynamic; it's not static. This is true in Canada and it's also true in other countries. What you find is that who is poor at any given time changes over the years, and you can see that reflected in the child poverty numbers. Over a period of time, more of those children will have lived in a low-income family than the number of poor children at any one time. I think American research illustrates this very clearly also. A family can become poor if a job is lost or if there's a divorce, or through the death of one of the family members. From that point of view, it's really essential to have the support of a robust system of early learning and child care in order to meet the needs of those families if they change.

The other thing, and I think this is really important to keep in mind, is the idea of programs for the poor and universal programs, which Canada has tended to support. The statement that programs for the poor are poor programs is often attributed to Wilbur Cohen, who is one of the architects of American social security. The

experience in other countries, particularly the United States, really does show that programs that are aimed at the poor are often marginalized programs in terms of recognition and support, and I think a really good illustration of this is the American head start program, which I got my start in early childhood education working on. In fact, that has never met the needs of even the poor families for whom it's intended. There are real shortages and underfunding. It's a very good illustration of the difference between programs for the poor and universal programs.

So just to pick up a couple of the elements of Bill C-303 that Campaign 2000 supports, in addition to the universal approach, first of all, the objectives of the bill that are stated at the beginning, that the primary objectives are to promote early childhood development and well-being and at the same time to support the participation of parents in employment or training and community life, are very much in keeping with Campaign 2000's principles. We would also go further to point out that there are other objectives for early learning and child care, such as social cohesion and social inclusion of new Canadians and aboriginal Canadians to bring them into a society, and equity objectives. These are very much our objectives.

We believe there is really the need for an act, because this is an issue of national importance, even though it's clearly within provincial jurisdiction, but a place for the federal government to play a role with the provinces and territories.

We support the conditions placed on universality, accessibility, and quality as merely illustrations of best practices for early learning and child care policy, and that's according to the body of empirical research and policy analysis. We very much urge accountability for public money spent, and we think the bill reflects those things in its insistence on not-for-profit services and on reporting.

I would just like to mention that we also would support an amendment, if there is an amendment, about the needs of aboriginal communities. We have aboriginal partners in Campaign 2000 who would really like specific recognition of the needs of aboriginal Canadians.

In closing, we would like to note that today, most of Canada's low-income children do not now have access to early learning and child care. I want to note that the OECD has singled Canada out to observe that, in Canada, only 20% of lone parents and 5% of disadvantaged groups are covered by early learning and child care.

I would like to really emphasize that in most parts of Canada, families of all incomes suffer because early learning and child care services do not exist in sufficient numbers or are of mediocre quality or aren't affordable. Bill C-303 is not the whole of the policy solution to this, but it's part of the policy solution. We know this is not a money bill, but together with adequate financing, a full policy framework, and political will at all levels, this legislation can be part of Canada's beginning to ameliorate the dismal state of early learning and child care.

Thank you very much.

• (0925)

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Thank you very much, Ms. Friendly and Ms. Rothman.

We are going to Code Blue for Child Care. Ms. Ballantyne and Ms. Colley, welcome. Between the two of you, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne (Volunteer, Code Blue for Child Care): Thank you very much.

I'm Morna Ballantyne. I'm going to share the seven minutes with Sue.

Thanks very much for the opportunity to be here with you.

I'll take a few minutes to explain what Code Blue is. We're actually not an organization; we describe ourselves as a "campaign" that has the support of a number of organizations and a number of individuals.

I was going to print out a list of all the individuals who support our campaign. I actually have a printout of half of our supporters—and it's here, but I'm not going to unroll it, because it's 85 feet long—just to give you a sense of who we represent and that we are representing large numbers of Canadians who are concerned about the state of early learning and child care in Canada.

We're very excited that Parliament and your committee are once again addressing a piece of legislation regarding early learning and child care. It's of course not the first time. This issue has been on the political agenda for many years.

I'm a parent of two children. I consider myself to be one of the relative newcomers to this issue, having been involved for 22 years. I got involved when I was pregnant with my first son.

This is an issue that is not going to go away until we have a system of early learning and child care, not just in Quebec but in all of Canada.

We want to make it clear that Bill C-303, in our opinion, which we support, does not in fact give Canadians everything that we need and want with respect to child care policy and programs. In fact, it's only one government instrument that's required. There are lots of other instruments that are required to be put in place by different levels of government, community, and individuals.

We've been following your committee deliberations very closely—I've been in attendance at every one of your hearings—and we are incredibly impressed with the attention you're giving to this issue, to this legislation. We're also impressed with the excellent submissions made by other witnesses.

But we think that there is still a lack of clarity about what this bill does and doesn't do. We've tried to summarize in a handout—in case you're wondering where that handout came from, that's from us—in a chart, some of the aspects of the bill. We hope that will help to clarify some of the myths and some of the realities.

One of the things we want to make clear is that we think this piece of legislation is actually very simple and straightforward. In fact, the representatives from the justice department testified to that.

It's certainly not advancing anything new. There's been a suggestion that it's not right or it's not proper for a piece of legislation to try to deal with this very complex issue. But in fact this legislation deals with issues that have been on the table, the subject of public and political debate and the subject of very complex federal-provincial negotiations, for many years.

Bill C-303 in fact represents a consensus of what the federal government needs to do. It also reflects what we know are the best practices in early learning and child care.

Sue is going to emphasize some of the other aspects of what the bill does and what it doesn't do.

The Chair: You have about three and a half minutes. You divided your time very well.

So there you go, three and a half minutes.

Ms. Sue Colley (Volunteer, Code Blue for Child Care): I won't take that much time, I think.

Good morning. My name is Sue Colley. I am the executive director of Building Blocks for Child Care, B2C2, which is a community not-for-profit development agency for child care, and I'm also a steering committee member of the Code Blue campaign for child care.

I really can't add very much to what Morna has said. I think that what we wanted to do.... Actually, Morna has given me copious notes about what's been going on in these hearings that she attended every day, and we thought it would be nice to try to simplify what we think the bill represents and why it's important to pass this bill, and present it in a simple table.

Simply, I would like to suggest that we just go through this list of what it does and what it doesn't do. First, it does not create a national program of early learning and child care. It does not direct the choices that families make for child care. We think that those are completely independent of this act. What it does do, however, is create a small number of conditions to any federal funding that Parliament decides to transfer to the provinces and territories for early learning and child care services. It does not authorize any spending or any increase in federal or provincial or territorial funding for early learning and child care, but what it does do is it makes provinces and territories accountable for any funding that they receive.

For example, if Bill C-303 became law, the \$600 million in federal transfers would be directed only to those provinces and territories with plans providing comprehensive early learning and child care that are of high quality, universal, and accessible. These transfers to the provinces would have to satisfy criteria related to accountability. And I do believe that with the federal government now spending \$2.65 billion that is really dedicated to early learning and child care, taxpayers would be pleased about the fact that there would be accountability for this.

It does not prevent any additional allocations. It does require that governments publicly report on how they spend federal funding. It doesn't venture into areas of provincial jurisdiction, as confirmed by the justice department in an earlier submission. It does require provinces and territories to consider the needs of children who are frequently excluded from programs; so children with special needs and children who live in rural, remote, and northern areas would be covered by this legislation. It doesn't limit federal funding only to the children of parents in the workforce. It makes programs open to all parents, whether the parents work or not. It does not address all the needs of Canadian families or children, nor does it preclude the federal government from giving children and families other supports, such as income supplements and enhanced parental leave, which we also think would be a good thing. It does require provinces and territories to address the high costs of early learning and child care, and it does require provinces and territories to address the uneven quality in early learning and child care, which means taking steps to ensure that every child attending receives a program that supports their well-being and development.

I would just add that the rest of our concerns about this bill are articulated in our brief and we also have a few other sheets that we have handed out. I just would like to add that we are very supportive of the two amendments that we believe have been proposed. One is an amendment that would incorporate language about aboriginal peoples being included in the act explicitly. And secondly, because we have never believed that family home child care is a for-profit service, we think that this should be clarified in the act so that it can be embraced within the act and within the funding.

I hope the members of the committee will see it in their wisdom to embrace the simplicity and the importance of the accountability provisions in this bill and enact it into legislation.

Thank you.

• (0930)

The Chair: And I thank you, Ms. Colley, as well as Ms. Ballantyne.

We're now going to move over to the Region of Peel. I believe we've got two groups. The Region of Peel, represented by Ms. Reid, who has seven minutes, and we also have another group, Success by Six Peel. Is that correct?

How do you pronounce your last name, Mr. Huether?

Mr. John Huether (Volunteer Member of Executive Council, Council of Champions, Success by Six Peel): Heater, like a hot water heater.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Huether. I like that. That's all right.

Ms. Reid, you have seven minutes, so you're on first and then we'll go to Mr. Huether.

Ms. Lorna Reid (Director, Early Years Integration, Children's Services, Region of Peel): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm Lorna Reid, and I'm currently the director of early years integration in the children's services department in the Region of Peel.

I'm privileged right now to lead Peel's Best Start strategy, which is part of Ontario's implementation of federal funding under various agreements. In this role, I served on the quality and human resources expert panel that submitted its report to the Minister of Children and Youth Services in March 2007. I believe this report will be of interest to this committee when it is released, as it speaks to many of the clauses in this bill.

Early learning and child care services have been integral to my life, both personally as a parent and professionally for over 30 years. The Region of Peel is a large upper-tier municipality of more than 1.2 million residents immediately to the west of Toronto. Peel experienced a growth rate of 17% between 2001 and 2006. Close to 50% of Peel's residents are immigrants, and 33% of the region is rural. In Ontario, the child care service system is led by consolidated municipal service managers, and Peel is one of 47 across the province.

This bill aligns well with the Region of Peel's position statement on early learning and child care services. The current council is on record supporting the creation of a national strategy. In fact, on March 8 a resolution regarding the development and funding of a national early learning and child care strategy was adopted by council and forwarded to Minister Solberg. Our previous council also endorsed a national vision for early learning and child care based on the principles that are outlined in this bill: quality, universality, and accessibility.

While Bill C-303 is not the national strategy that council envisioned, it is a beginning measure that sets some national standards.

Peel's position statement also aligns with the provisions in the bill that address quality, accessibility, and accountability. Peel Social Services is committed to ensuring that the early learning and child care programs of the department are fully accessible to all residents of Peel and support inclusion of all families in effective child development. It is committed to playing a leadership role in planning collaborative strategies with others and is committed to designing innovative services that meet the needs of families of diverse backgrounds and that are responsive to the changing needs of the community.

It is very important, from the region's perspective, that criteria and conditions for funding for early learning and child care programs are established, and that provinces and territories and their programs are held accountable. Peel welcomes accountability measures to ensure, for example, that the \$250 million for child care spaces announced in the federal budget will be allocated to local communities by our province. Communities know the needs and service gaps, and integrated service plans are under way.

The Region of Peel holds its own programs accountable through quality assurance processes and through annual financial audits when funding amounts of \$20,000 and greater are allocated. Peel welcomes accountability measures at all levels.

Peel's position statements comment specifically on quality and accessibility, specifically stating that everyone benefits from quality early learning and child care. Quality service contributes positively to a child's development and learning; it compensates trained early childhood professionals fairly; it recognizes the primary importance of a child's home environment and of his or her relationship with parents; it partners with parents; it promotes parents' employment; it provides economic benefits to the community, families, and the children.

Peel's programs and policies are designed to be as flexible as permitted within the funding envelopes and guidelines, thereby ensuring that as many families as possible can access programs. Despite these efforts, families wait for fee subsidy, for special needs resources, and for family supports. Only 12% of children age zero to twelve can access licensed child care programs, and only 3% of Peel's children have access to fee subsidy. In our Ontario early years programs there are waiting lists and lineups for the programs that are provided.

Peel's position statement calls upon the government to adopt the OECD recommendations regarding investment in early learning and child care to increase accessibility.

● (0935)

Clause 10 of the bill outlines the creation of a broadly based advisory council. Peel council uses this model effectively to hear from those directly impacted by its programs and services.

The Chair: You have two minutes left, Ms. Reid.

Ms. Lorna Reid: Thank you.

Peel uses this model to validate the reports of departments. This clause of the bill will further strengthen accountability. However, the timeframe of 60 days may be too ambitious, as programs in Peel report their successes to Peel, Peel reports to the Province of Ontario, and the province reports to the federal minister. Ninety days would be more achievable.

Clause 7 references withholding of payments when a province or territory does not satisfy a criterion or condition set out in clauses 5 or 6. Another option could be to work directly with municipalities or other entities in instances when the province or territory does not comply. Communities and families have been severely impacted when provinces did not use early learning and child care funding for its intended purpose.

In summary, Bill C-303 aligns well with the Region of Peel's social services position statement on early learning and child care in all clauses except clause 6, where consideration of the matter has not taken place. Peel's council has repeatedly asked for a national approach to early childhood development and well-being and is very encouraged by the progress of Bill C-303 to date. This legislation will support council's goal of providing high-quality, universally accessible early learning and child care services, from which everyone in Peel benefits.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Reid, for that presentation.

We're now going to our last witness, Mr. Huether. You have seven minutes for the Success by Six Peel.

Mr. John Huether: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I'm very honoured to be able to make this presentation on behalf of Success by Six Peel. My name is John Huether and I'm a volunteer member of the executive of the Council of Champions of Success by Six Peel. In the past, I was the executive director of the Peel Children's Aid Society.

Success by Six is a collaboration of more than 40 partners from different sectors of the community, including business, labour, and human services. We are dedicated to ensuring that all children zero to six will thrive in Peel. We are committed to research, public and professional education, and community capacity building. Success by Six provides coordinating support to a variety of early learning and child care programs, including neighbourhood parenting programs. Our strength is in our multidisciplinary approach.

There are over 100,000 children in Peel under the age of five. A recent study of school readiness using the widely recognized early development instrument revealed that more than 27% of the children entering school in Peel Region were not ready to learn in one or more of the domains covered by the EDI.

In Peel, one in seven children live in poverty. Only 4,000 children have access to fee subsidy for child care within the 22,500 licensed spaces in the region. Therefore, there is a great need to increase the number of licensed and subsidized spaces within our region. To address the gap in Peel and in many other regions of Canada, significant investments must be made by both the provincial and federal governments in early learning and child care.

We're very pleased that Parliament has passed Bill C-303 through second reading for review by this committee. We believe that, if passed, this bill can make a positive contribution. It is extremely important that much-needed additional investments in early learning and child care are made consistent with the principles of quality, accessibility, universality, and accountability. Therefore, we support the express purpose of the bill as outlined.

We are supportive of the definition of early learning and child care service, which includes parent support and child drop-in centres. We are strongly in favour of the provision of substantially more child care spaces for parents and families, and support the range of options listed. We are also cognizant of the value of high-quality parenting support programs, which teach parents strategies to promote healthy development. Programs such as the Ontario Early Years Centres in neighbourhood hubs have demonstrated their value to children and parents. These parenting support services can well be combined with core child care services and programs so there is flexibility to respond to the needs of families. A full range of child care programs and parenting support programs should be supported by this bill.

We're supportive of the provisions in the bill that address quality. The reference to standards related to compensation in subclause 5(3) is welcome. The provision would support the need to increase the salaries of many professionals in the early learning and child care field who are not fairly compensated for their contributions to the well-being of children and society. In Peel, for example, the average salary of early childhood educators is in the neighbourhood of \$18,000.

In examining subclause 5(3) on quality and in keeping with the above comments about parent support programs, we would urge that the criteria be written in such a way that does not preclude parent support programs being funded using federal dollars. We are concerned that the current wording of paragraph 5(3)(b) may have this result. Perhaps an additional provision related to parent-child programs in this section might be added.

Universality, in our view, is important to an effective, accessible early learning and child care program. We agree with the interpretation that this means these programs should be available to every child whose parent or guardian wishes to avail themselves of them.

There is a danger that the words "equally entitled to early learning and child care services that are appropriate to their needs" will continue to mean having equal access to waiting lists, unless greater investment is forthcoming.

• (0945)

We wonder if consideration could be given to setting targets for funding for early learning and child care. This could lead to Canada's investing 1.25% or 1.5% of GDP in early learning and child care, instead of our appallingly low current contribution of 0.25%.

We are encouraged by the specific reference to children with special needs in subclause 5(5). In making this provision a reality, the contributions and supports provided by specialized services to young children with special needs must be recognized. Speech and language specialists, public health nurses, mental health workers, occupational and physiotherapists all contribute to quality programming for special needs children in early learning and child care programs. Therefore, it is important to include the funding of these kinds of supports for integration, as well as appropriate teacher-child ratios within the purview of this legislation.

We welcome the accountability requirements outlined in clause 8. It is important that Canada have the ability to track the impact of its investments in supporting children in their early years.

We are also supportive of the provisions for the creation of the advisory council on early learning and child care. We know from the growing body of research in neuroscience and other sciences that the early years are crucial to the healthy development of all children. It is therefore important to support investment in early learning and child care.

Parents and families have the primary responsibility to care for and make sound decisions about their child's development. They should be supported in their responsibilities. To the significant extent that this bill supports this policy direction, it is worthy of support.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Huether.

I know that it was suggested by Ms. Dhalla that we have two five-minute rounds so we can get more questions in. We're going to start right now with the opposition.

Ms. Dhalla, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Thank you very much.

I'm glad that our chair is back, because it gives me an opportunity to ask questions.

First, I want to say thank you to all of you.

I know that many of you are distinguished in your particular field, in terms of advocating and ensuring that as a country we have a national program for early learning and child care.

Thank very much for coming, in particular to Lorna and John, since they're from the Region of Peel in my constituency of Brampton.

First, I want to start off by congratulating Code Blue on the tremendous work you have done as an organization. I think the report card you published, I believe in February, really hit home. For anyone on the committee who hasn't seen it, it allocated five major areas and gave Prime Minister Stephen Harper a grade. I believe that on universal child care, you gave him a grade of F; on parental choice, it was a D; on balancing work and family, it was an F; accessibility was an incomplete; and I believe on honouring agreements, it says that Stephen doesn't play well with others. He said that he would honour agreements, and he went back on his word. You gave him an F.

I know that many parents across this country have really used—

• (0950)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Did he get anything for doubling the funding?

The Chair: No discussion here

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: No, but I will make sure that I table this, so that all members of our committee can see this great initiative that was done by Code Blue and organizations such as the Child Care Advocacy Association and others.

I think all of us really feel the pain that the provinces have in terms of the fact that they were left in disarray, and parents were left scrambling to find child care spaces.

Today we realize the importance of this bill, due to the fact that the early learning and child care agreements were cancelled by the Prime Minister.

One of the unfortunate parts about the bill that we're discussing and is before us today is that even though the NDP brought it forward, it requires a royal recommendation.

We always say that hindsight is 20:20. I don't think the NDP realized when they formed a coalition with the Conservatives to defeat the Liberals that the first act of the Prime Minister would be to have this particular important piece of legislation ripped to shreds, and there would be a completely different approach.

So going on to some of the questioning, I want to find out from the Region of Peel in particular.... You spoke about the struggle that parents are facing—especially in Peel, I think—which is so indicative of many of our constituencies across the country. It is multilingual, multi-ethnic. There is a combination of urban and rural as well, in terms of the demographics.

How many parents are waiting to enroll their children in some of the spaces? What is the wait list like?

Ms. Lorna Reid: Currently we have over 2,000 children waiting for subsidized child care.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: How long would they be on a wait list?

Ms. Lorna Reid: They could be on a wait list for up to 18 months.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: How many spaces are available right now?

Ms. Lorna Reid: There are none available in terms of subsidy, but we have enough funding for 4,000 spaces out of the 22,000 licensed spaces.

I could give you an example of something that came to my attention in Brampton last week. I'm not sure whether it was in your constituency or not. We learned about an illegal program in a new section of Brampton where a woman was caring for 26 children in her basement and the basement of two other homes.

Of course the ministry found out and has closed it down. But I drove through the community: big new shiny houses, but no services anywhere, no buildings that could be used for child care, other than a new school. That new school already had portables. So there is no place, unless there were funding to build an addition to the school, to provide that child care.

As you know, Brampton is one of the fastest-growing cities in Canada. But it's not just Brampton. There are huge sections of Peel where these subdivisions are going up with no infrastructure around early learning and child care services, anything for parents and their families.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: The struggle I'm faced with every Friday when I meet my constituents in my office, and otherwise when I see them at a variety of events in the riding, is that they want to ensure that their children do have access to quality care, that it is affordable at the same time, and that their children are going to be cared for while they've made the choice to work. One of their frustrations is that there aren't any spaces available.

How much would you estimate that a particular space costs to enrol a child for child care?

Ms. Lorna Reid: It depends on the age of the child. We usually average it out at about \$8,000 a year as the cost. If it's an infant, it could be more than \$10,000; if the child is school-age, much less than that.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: So the \$1,200 being given really wouldn't allow coverage for the \$8,000 it would cost for a space.

Ms. Lorna Reid: No. We worked it out. It would provide maybe just over \$4 a day, and the cost of care for an infant could be close to \$60 a day, and for a school-ager at the lower end probably \$18 a day.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I think they're just getting \$60 a month.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dhalla and Ms. Reid.

We're going to now move to our next member, Mr. Lessard, from the Bloc. You have five minutes, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I also want to thank our guests for their presentations this morning, which were very enlightening and constructive. You have provided the necessary clarification not about the weaknesses, but about the adjustments that must be made to the bill. I think this bill is strong because it dares propose something progressive.

I will address my first comments to Ms. Pitre-Robin, from the Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance. We have had an opportunity to hear from people who were highly critical of the Quebec system of early childhood development centres. They were often encouraged by our friends opposite, which is very worrisome. You raised something very important. The centres were set up following incredible efforts made to by women's groups, by the families as such, and by the Quebec government, despite the opposition, often on the part of the Canadian government.

You raised the issue of funding. We know that the Quebec government set up these centres in 1977. Every year, Quebec families face a federal shortfall of about \$240 million. If they were paying themselves, they would receive income tax refunds. So the Canadian government is saving money that is not injected into the Quebec economy. That clearly shows that it is a societal choice, a policy choice.

You mentioned that these measures had considerably reduced poverty among women who are single parents, etc. That is very consistent with what we have seen, for example, for a similar network over the past 10 years in Ireland. In the past 10 years, the poverty rate for families in Ireland has gone from 15% to 6.8%. That is huge, whereas in Canada the rate has stagnated at 16%.

I would like you to go back to the principle of universality. People are very reluctant about that due to the economics of it. My party and I have always claimed that it was not an expenditure, but an investment in our children. I would like to hear you elaborate on the principle of universality.

● (0955)

Ms. Claudette Pitre-Robin: Thank you for your question.

I would like to start by clarifying that in Quebec, spaces cost \$7 for all families, but that they are free for 20.5 hours per week for families receiving income security. Moreover, if they have a certificate from a health care professional, care may be provided full-time, if it is possible to prove that being in child care full-time is good for the children. Considerable steps are taken so that the most underprivileged children can have access to educational services. It is important for them, so that they are better prepared to start school, and consequently, to continue down their life path.

Often, criticism revolves around equity. People ask why they pay \$7 when some people have very high incomes. I attempted to explain it quickly. On the one hand, children must have access to educational services. We know that it is of the utmost importance for them to be successful in school and for them to develop fully. The calculations in the examples that I provided earlier covered higher-income families. The example is contained in the document that I did not have translated, but I do have copies that I will leave on the table before leaving. Families in higher brackets—in other words, families earning \$93,000 and more and that represent 20% of the population of Quebec—pay, through their income tax, \$9.60 more per day. So they are paying \$16.60, whereas income taxes for families with the lowest incomes—those earning less than \$24,000 per year, in other words 20% of families—pay an additional contribution of \$0.30. That makes their total \$7.30. It is a universal measure everyone has access to by paying \$7.00 on daily basis. Generally speaking, the tax system establishes the contribution of households with higher incomes. The system is based on a universal vision where everyone contributes to supporting the education of young children. It is very important.

● (1000)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lessard.

We are now going to move to Ms. Chow for five minutes.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): On the Code Blue campaign, perhaps you could describe the kind of support this bill has had in the past activities of your organization and what kind of depth of support you have received across the country.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: As I said, our campaign is made up of a number of individuals who have signed on to the campaign demands. One of the demands of the campaign from the outset has been federal legislation that addresses early learning and child care. We have 100,000 individuals who have signed on to those demands from across the country. We also have a number of organizations; we estimate that about three million individuals are represented through those organizations.

Code Blue has done some polling on the subject, and there is absolutely no question that there is very strong widespread support

from individuals of all income levels and of both genders, both in the paid workforce and outside the paid workforce, who actually support putting in place a system of early learning and child care.

The other thing to note is that when that system was put in place in Quebec, it is widely known that it was the most popular thing a government has ever done. It's what people want government to do: to intervene in a way that individuals can't. You can have as much money individually, but that doesn't create access to spaces. That doesn't create spaces. It doesn't create a system, and that's what Canadians want. Certainly that is our understanding, and that comes from polling, which is a little bit more scientific, but it also comes from the numerous letters.

I was copied in at least 250 or 260 letters to each of you supporting this legislation. I'm not sure how that compares. When you study a bill, I don't know if you hear from that many Canadians who are actually paying attention to what Parliament is doing. I think there is widespread support.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Politicians are always very interested in polling. Do you have more information about that?

I think her ears perked up.

You can perhaps submit it later on.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: Information on the polling we did is actually available on our website in both French and English, but we could also give copies to the clerk for distribution. We can do that very quickly, because you are moving forward in your meetings. We can do that right away.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you.

Here's another question, probably for Ms. Friendly. I see the chart that was handed out today that talks about "federal transfers designated by early learning and child care". It breaks down the total by province by fiscal year, so you folks must be tracking how the provinces are using or not using the funding. Perhaps one of you can expand on that.

Ms. Martha Friendly: Since you submitted the chart, perhaps you'd like to respond.

Ms. Sue Colley: Yes. We are trying to track the amount of money.

What this table shows is first, on the first page there, a list of allocations from the federal government that were explicitly dedicated to early learning and child care funding from 2003-04 on. That doesn't include moneys that were in the CST, which already existed as a cost-shared portion of the federal funding.

You'll see that the total is extensive: \$2.65 billion, which is why we are really supporting this bill for more accountability on the part of provinces and territories, the recipients of that funding.

If you look, you'll see that what's happening, of course, is that because of the reduction in the 2007-08 fiscal year as a result of the cancellation of the agreements, the amount of money has been reduced in every single province across the country.

Our next task, Ms. Chow, is to track what impact that's had on actual provincial spending, because in fact the lack of any accountability means that right now we actually don't know what impact it's had on each individual province's budget.

Ms. Martha Friendly: Could I just follow up on that, Olivia?

• (1005)

The Chair: Do so very quickly, because we're almost out of time.

Ms. Martha Friendly: This is quite true. The information about how much money is allocated by province is available on the Internet. I want to add that I'm very concerned about the absence of reporting that seems to be happening. Beginning with the multi-lateral framework agreement in 2003, there was a requirement for public reporting from the provinces of how the money was spent, whether to Canadians or to Albertans—or whatever the province is. That seems to be disappearing.

In addition to that, I'm particularly concerned that the money for research and for monitoring and tracking is gone, and so it's going to become increasingly difficult for people like me—researchers—and for anybody else to be able to track any of these kinds of things. I think this is an enormous concern, from a public accountability perspective.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Friendly.

We're now going to move to the Conservatives for the last question of this round. Mr. Brown, you have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I've got a few questions for the witnesses today on the issues of limiting choice, withholding payment, and universality. I'm still waiting for someone to make a case for this bill. We haven't seen that yet, and I'm going to try to get you to analyze these three areas of concern.

In terms of limiting choice, clause 3 states that the purpose of this act is to establish criteria and conditions that must be met before a child care transfer payment may be made. Ms. Dallaire from the CCAAC stated last Tuesday that her organization's 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.

My concern is that this bill could potentially take away from that. We've already heard that Mr. Dion would take away the \$2.4 billion provided directly to parents under the universal child care benefit; that's disconcerting, because there are obviously people who aren't in that cookie cutter formula of day care that this would take away. It would limit choice for parents.

We'd be saying to parents that if a father or mother wanted to stay at home to provide their child care services, they don't qualify. It would limit the ability of parents to pick the child care service that they deem is most important to their children.

My larger concern with this bill is the withholding of funds for child care. We've already seen that happen provincially in the Province of Ontario; Dalton McGuinty, the Liberal Premier of Ontario, was given \$97.5 million for child care, and in this year's budget the only need he said he saw was \$25 million. He took \$72.5 million from child care.

Now we see one government doing it. I don't want to give the tools to another government to withhold funds for child care. I struggle to see how a bill about child care.... The only thing it does is provide means to take away child care funding. It gives governments a knife to cut funding, and we saw this happen in the early 1990s when the then Liberal government cut \$25 billion from social services.

We realize, obviously, that Pierre Trudeau left the country a debt of \$38 billion in 1984, so they had to make cuts, but I don't want to give governments the ability to cut child care. If they're going to make cuts in the way the Liberals did, why are we going to allow them to do it in areas of social services?

What this bill says is that child care is a free target for governments. It says that if they want to pick any excuse to cut child care, they can. I don't want to see governments cutting child care. I am very proud that this government tripled the funding for child care. That's something we can be proud of, supporting child care, but we have a bill now that allows us to cut the heart out of child care if a government decides to. If the Liberals were returned and decided to make their target area child care, this bill allows it. Any government could. When am I going to hear a case, an argument, of how this is going to enhance child care, how it's going to enhance choice, how it's going to add funding?

We've already heard from Ms. Savoie, the person who put this bill forward, that there's no new funding involved in this bill—no new funding. I've heard from witnesses who seemed to be anticipating that this would mean more funding for child care. Let's be very clear—there is not a cent, and that's from the person who put this bill forward.

I'll give you one example of how a government down the road could have the means to cut child care. Ms. Savoie said it would be conditional on universality. Subclause 5(4) states the criterion of universality must be met in order for a province to receive funding. Well, in Quebec right now, which is exempt, that's 54%. About 50% in Quebec have child care services, so we have a concern now that there are going to be different interpretations of universality, and a future government could use that tool, as Paul Martin did between 1993 and 1997, to cut child care.

I found the comments by Ms. Friendly interesting. Are you concerned that this bill provides no new funding, and are you concerned that this bill provides governments with an ability to block and freeze child care funding?

• (1010)

The Chair: Ms. Friendly, you don't have a whole lot of time, so we'll let you get in a quick response.

Ms. Martha Friendly: To answer your first question, you must know that a private member's bill may not be a money bill, so this is not a money bill. It's a private member's bill. That's number one.

Number two, we could have a talk about social policy. Federalism is not a perfect instrument. I believe there are many things that you're confused about from your remarks. No, I'm not concerned that it will serve to freeze or cut child care spending; I think the purpose of the bill is to shape the federal money that's now being spent.

Are those your two questions? The rest wasn't a question.

I don't believe that the bill has.... The bill is not about freezing policy, but about shaping it.

The Chair: That's all the time we're going to have. We're over.

Ms. Martha Friendly: If you look at how to shape child care policy, part of it is to use the best practices in a bill, which is what this does.

The Chair: Ms. Friendly, that's all the time we have. We're actually over time. We're going to have to maybe catch up in the next round as we move forward.

Mr. Savage, you have five minutes, please.

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

I've had have a habit of following Mr. Brown in questions. It's a treat. It's a little bit like following the elephants in the parade, but rather than stop and pick up all that stuff, let's just go around it and let's get serious about child care.

I want to give you a scenario that happened to me in the last election campaign. This is an issue that has galvanized child care workers and it's an issue that people feel very passionate about.

Conservative members don't like this bill. They didn't like the early learning and child care, and they feel passionately about it. I feel passionately that we should have some kind of framework for early learning and child care. I'd prefer that we actually had the money as well, that was allocated—it was certainly a good start—in the last Parliament.

The scenario I'm talking about was in the election campaign. Late in the campaign I had a call from a child care centre called The Growing Place in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. They called me up—and it was not political at all; I hadn't met the people who worked there. They asked me to come in.

They said they were very concerned about what was going to happen if the Conservative Party won the election. She said some of them had voted Conservative and some of them had voted Liberal and some of them had voted NDP, but that this issue was important to them because they felt so strongly.

Where I come from in Nova Scotia, I've talked before about the heroes of child care, such as Sue Wolstenholme, who I know some of you would know; and Pat Hogan, who won a national award and who operates a child care in a low-income area of Dartmouth. These folks have been waving the flag for a long time and saying we need to do something here. They were pretty excited about the early learning and child care, particularly the signing of the agreement in Nova Scotia that took place at the military family resource centre in May of 2005.

But it was the folks at The Growing Place who had a particular impact on me, because they'd never been involved, and they hadn't fought for this before; they had always run their own show. All of a sudden they had the sense that they were going to do something, first of all about wages, and something about the training of child care workers, and that there was going to be funding. Other people were excited that we were going to be able to provide minority language child care spaces in Nova Scotia as part of the agreement that was being arranged. Some special-needs parents were excited that for the first time they saw light at the end of the tunnel.

So my question is not so much on the money side. I want a sense, from some of you who have been in the child care field for a long time and have fought the battle, of how people are feeling, if that's a fair question.

The Chair: Ms. Rothman.

Ms. Laurel Rothman: Perhaps I could comment on how low-income mothers are feeling. We recently had a forum on living wages, a couple of weeks ago, pulling together people from a wide range of faith communities, of aboriginal communities, of low-income people. Lone mothers told us that when they cancelled the agreement, they knew they wouldn't even be able to wait for the year on the waiting list, or whatever.

Putting the pieces together of getting economic independence includes, first and foremost, some secure housing so that you have an address and a way to get going. Then it's child care, if you're going to start with either part-time employment, training, and/or post-secondary education. There's a whole range of things that follow after that, but if you don't have child care, you can't. If you're a parent of a young child—or a school-age child, but let's talk about young children—you're not going to get out that door. So we have lots of lone mothers saying, "Forget it; I don't have a chance, if there aren't going to be more child care services that I'm close to and that I can afford."

●(1015)

Ms. Martha Friendly: Some of us have been working in this area since our children were little. Laurel and I were parents at the York University Cooperative Child Care Centre together, and some of us are now grandmothers—I'm not a grandmother yet, but I could be—but our children are unable to find child care. So we're now in a whole other generation.

You meet people such as the security guard in my University of Toronto building, a young Egyptian guy with two little kids whose wife really wants to work, partly so she can learn English, but also because they don't have enough money, and he's working two jobs. They're on the Toronto subsidy waiting list. He is very interested in politics and he said this was really something he could look forward to. I kept explaining that he wouldn't get child care right away, because it would take time to build the system. But it's people like that who will still be looking for child care down the road, as our children are, if something doesn't happen.

What hasn't happened in Canada is the first step; we haven't really taken the first step. I mean, we took the first step, and it was taken away. That's how we feel about it after all these years. These people who are our children, and their colleagues, aren't going to get child care either. That's how it feels.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Friendly, and thank you, Mr. Savage.

We're going to move to Mr. Lessard, for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I would like to congratulate Ms. Friendly for the answer she gave Mr. Brown. It is accurate to say that, since this is a private member's bill, steps must be taken to ensure that there is no additional financial impact, to prevent the government from requiring royal recommendation to block the bill, which would be quite disastrous.

Mr. Brown's comments serve us well, as he has shown that it is the federal government that cut off funding. We are dependent upon its willingness to provide funding. Previous governments, including the Conservative government, have withdrawn funding that belonged to the provinces. For example, the equivalent of 25% of the budget in the form of transfers should be earmarked for health care. Over the past 15 years, it has been reduced to 15%. It was increased to 17%, but we can still see the difference.

Quebec made that choice, but we would like the program to also apply to other provinces, because they deserve to have a very good program. What's more, as long as they do not have a universal program like that, Quebec will continue to face pressure to whittle this program.

My question is very precise, and it deals with accountability. I am always astonished to see the extent to which you would like the Canadian government to oversee provincial accountability. That seems quite contradictory to me given the mandate devolved to the provinces, because the provinces are the ones responsible for child care services. It also seems to be needlessly dependent on the federal government. When the Quebec government wanted to opt out of the program and increase child care fees, there was an outcry. It is easier to exercise pressure on a provincial government than on a federal government.

What do you think about that?

•(1020)

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Colley.

Ms. Sue Colley: Thank you.

I would really like to congratulate the Province of Quebec for having taken such a strong step, in terms of the universality of child care in Canada. It is really unfortunate that most provinces have either not had the political will or the funding—and I think in most cases, it's the funding—to be able to emulate the kind of system that exists in Quebec.

Obviously what we are here to talk about today—and many others have come before us—is the importance of having federal funding,

in order that we can begin to expand our services in a fashion like Quebec.

Personally, I think that Pauline Marois is a hero in Canada. Even though there has been a lot of negative criticism about the Quebec program, I think you will find that the research is about to be turned around. I understand that there's going to be a speech made at the Learning Societies in two days' time. A paper that's being produced basically shows that the accessibility of programs in Quebec are distributed proportionately to income across the entire province.

Hopefully we'll set some of the record straight on what is actually happening in Quebec, as opposed to many of these rumours that I know you are beleaguered by all of the time, and that we find difficult in the rest of Canada in terms of being able to emulate the programs.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Ballantyne, you have about 30 seconds left.

Ms. Morna Ballantyne: I think it was very helpful for Parliament to recognize Quebec as a nation within Canada, but implied in that recognition is that the rest of the provinces together form a nation. The federal government has always played an important role in exercising its spending power in developing programs that help build the nation as an identity.

What we're saying is that the federal government should exercise leadership and use its spending power to encourage the development of a program that will help the nation-building exercise outside of Quebec. It is essential, because it has not happened without federal leadership.

Given that these are federal dollars being spent and transferred to the provinces, it's absolutely essential that there be an accountability to the federal Parliament, because the authority for spending that money was made by the federal Parliament.

So it's very simple. We don't have difficulty with the accountability mechanism set out in the bill, as long as they don't apply to Quebec, because there has been recognition that Quebec is a distinct nation.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ballantyne. I'm sure Mr. Lessard appreciated that answer.

We're going to move to Ms. Chow, for five minutes please.

Ms. Olivia Chow: In my travels, sometimes I take the train, but other times I take Air Canada. There was an ad in the Air Canada magazine that talked about good choice. It said, "defining child care since 1988". It had an actual statement of earnings available for every school, with no educational experience required. "The Goddard School is the franchise system for success-oriented entrepreneurs"—this is the Goddard School for Early Childhood Development. It is a child care franchise centre. It is asking Canadians to come and purchase this franchise to start up child care centres. The founder, Marijke Strachan, is not a teacher, she said. She doesn't have a degree in education, and yet she is running a preschool. It's in the ad itself. It boasts that the advertising department produced top-quality, award-winning print, TV, and radio advertisements, so that you too, without any education or training whatsoever, can start up your own child care centre.

Do we want profit-making companies to run education child care centres for our children? How does this bill deal with it?

• (1025)

Ms. Martha Friendly: No.

It's quite extreme.

[Translation]

Ms. Claudette Pitre-Robin: Ms. Marois' 1996 project aimed to transform all child care services into not-for-profit child care centres, which meant buying back child care centres. The government made a different choice when it realized just how many spaces it would have to offer. For the government, it was not possible to earmark funding to buy spaces that already existed, and so it decided to create new spaces. The question still arises in Quebec, because parents have access to \$7-a-day spaces even in for-profit child care centres.

The current problem is that for-profit child care centres require parents to pay \$5, \$7, \$8 and \$10 in addition to the \$7, even though they are funded by the government at a rate of 5% less than early childhood development centres. That child care system is based on a truly lucrative vision.

The government even initiated legal action against the owners of day care centres to force them to respect the \$7 rate. It is very dangerous to develop that kind of child care service. We don't want all child care services to be identical, but we want to ensure that funding is truly earmarked for the education of young people by competent staff who are trained.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Colley.

Ms. Sue Colley: Ms. Chow, I think this is definitely not the way we want our early learning and child care system to go. In many ways it's terrible that Canada is the lowest spender and therefore the slowest industrialized country to get off the ground with early learning and child care, but at least it gives us the opportunity to learn from other countries' experiences. For example, as soon as there is substantial government funding in programs like child care, what you see internationally is that there suddenly becomes much more motivation for large corporations to be able to get involved with industrial expansion.

Australia is probably one of the most significant examples, because ten years ago they had a system exactly like ours today, which was dominated by not-for-profit centres. The government started introducing funding through tax credits and subsidy mechanisms in significant amounts, and what we now have in Australia is the development of a \$3 billion boom industry, with profit margins of up to 58%, and \$1.6 billion of that is flowed to those corporate gains through taxpayers' money.

So I think it is true—and I think Ms. Reid will also explain this—that when we have a system of child care where about 85% of the portion of expenditures has to go to wages, which is the most important ingredient in quality programming, and when we have such low wages as we have today, you will see there is not very much room for profit to be made in a child care centre. Consequently, what we are concerned about is not the existing programs that struggle probably in the same way as our not-for-profit centres struggle, but that if you expand the element of government

funding, what ends up happening is that large corporate chains will buy all those centres.

A Gold Coast expert in Australia has said the government pays the subsidies, the parents pay the fees two weeks in advance. That's nice, because it's guaranteed, and property prices keep going up and up and up and that's where they make their asset values and increase their property 58%.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Colley.

We're now going to move to the last questioner of this round. Mr. Lake, five minutes, please.

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of points to make right off the bat.

John, when you were talking about numbers, you said something about 1.5% of GDP should be spent on child care. I just did some quick math based on the GDP, and it confirms pretty much what we were saying. If you do the math, it works out to \$21 billion, which is consistent with some of the conversation we've had in this committee.

I noticed, based on comments by several of the members of the panel today, that there seems to be a small group of vocal advocates, working together but dividing themselves for the purposes of the committee, who wield enormous influence and are somewhat funded by the former Liberal government. I think that just confirms my thoughts on that today.

I did note that Ms. Dhalla seemed very surprised when she discussed the fact that we would actually fulfill one of our five priorities by switching out the Liberal universal child care program to introduce our universal child care benefit for parents, thereby benefiting all families. I suppose the concept of a party doing what it says it's going to do is somewhat foreign to the Liberals, but that's just a side comment.

Lorna, I just wanted to comment. You made a point about 26 kids living in substandard conditions. I agree with you. I don't think you would find anybody who would disagree that it's a terrible situation. I think you mentioned that the social services department stepped in to remedy that situation. I appreciate the fact that they did that, because no one would advocate for anything even close to that type of situation. It's horrible, and I'm glad that social services stepped in.

I think one of you also mentioned that the Peel region has a population that is about 50% immigrants. I think that was the number you used. My own riding of Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont is similar; it's in the 30% range. One of the cultural dynamics that I've witnessed and have an enormous amount of respect for is the tightness of family. It's incredibly important to the people in my riding. You have multiple generations living under the same roof. You have grandparents and aunts and uncles helping care for their kids. You have a tremendously strong work ethic, and everybody is doing what they can do. They make huge sacrifices.

The thing that I hear is that it's all about the kids. It's about making the best life possible for their children, and they work so hard to make that work. They don't wield political influence. They don't have large groups of people working for them on Parliament Hill or advocating for them; they just put their heads down, work as hard as they can, spend time with their family, and love their kids.

When I talk to them, they don't want their tax dollars going to fund other people's choices. Contrary to what some people would say, they really do appreciate the \$1,200 per year they receive per child from the UCCB. It's a huge deal to them.

I know Ms. Dhalla's riding—and I think you mentioned that you're in her riding—is very similar. It's probably even more so, percentage-wise, than mine in that way. I'm always surprised at the stand she takes on a bill like this, because it's certainly not in the best interests of her constituents. It's not something that.... It just doesn't represent the values that I see. I'm curious what you say to those families that are working so hard, and this bill does absolutely nothing for them.

• (1030)

Ms. Lorna Reid: John and I would both like to speak to that.

One of the things that I could say to you is that when we talk about choices, there needs to be a range of choices. There are, in fact, a large number of families, and Malton is very close to the area that Ms. Dhalla represents. We turn children away every single day from that particular child care centre, so we have no sense of what other kinds of choices they're making. They may be going up the road, up Airport Road, to this particular kind of situation.

Also, those parents who are making the choice to stay at home need to be able to look at the other early-years services, such as parenting centres, Ontario Early Years Centres, the readiness centres, and so on. I remember that when I was at home on maternity leave, I wasn't part of the targeted group; I was an older mom. I, as much as anybody else, needed to have access to those parenting centres, but I couldn't, because of the situation I was in.

I don't see child care as being the only solution. There are ranges of things that people need at different times in their lives, and we're trying to build that range of services so that in a school, for example, where there is a child care centre, there's a parenting centre, and people can switch back and forth.

The Chair: Mr. Lake, that's all the time we have.

Mr. Huether, do you want to add a quick comment?

Mr. John Huether: With regard to your comment about the 1.5% of GDP, I'd like to say that Canada would be a much better country if it invested this kind of money in a whole range of services that could support young children and their families, so that the kind of people you talked about can be supported in fulfilling their obligations.

Our message in our community is that they want a range of supports. They want child care, and they don't want to be sitting on wait lists while their child grows from six months to three years. They want a range of services, and it's embarrassing for this country, as rich as it is, to be investing the little amount of money.

I have no problem with you putting \$1,200 into the hands of parents in relation to this, as long as you provide additional services

that they can afford and have access to. That's what's missing in this current arrangement.

With all due respect, the enormous cut that your government made in relation to the child care agreements is appalling. That should be built on, not cut, and go at it from both sides of the equation.

• (1035)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Huether.

Mr. Mike Lake: I'd like to make a point of clarification. This bill does nothing about a range of choices. It's basically one option; it's not a range of options.

The Chair: That's more debate.

I want to thank the witnesses for taking time to be here today. We know that there's a lot of passion, as has been mentioned, on both sides of this debate.

We are going to suspend for a few minutes. However, before we do that, we are handing out some forms right now with regard to the Centennial Flame, and we need it to get approval. We received more requests this year, and this was what the clerk put together to make some sense, in order to get some things. Could we approve this?

Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me take this opportunity to also thank all the witnesses who were here.

Unfortunately, I won't be here for the second round. As I mentioned to you, Mr. Chair, this committee conflicts with another committee that I have, which starts at 11 o'clock. So I will not be able to stay and ask questions. I had put my name forward to ask questions, but unfortunately with the time running out, I won't be able to.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Bonsant.

[Translation]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): There is a mistake in the translation. It says "March 10" in French and it should say May 10.

[English]

The Chair: Okay, we'll make a note of that. Thank you very much.

Could we use this as a form for the Centennial Flame? Is there any more discussion?

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: Once again, it's just some more housekeeping.

The second thing before us is that we wanted to create a little time for the committee to hear from some of the department officials, so we carved out 30 minutes, if there are any questions we have before starting clause-by-clause on May 10. Are there any concerns about that?

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

The Chair: We're going to suspend for five minutes to set up the video conference for the next round.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1045)

The Chair: If we could get the members back to their seats, we still have about four or five witnesses we need to hear, and of course we hope to get a couple of rounds of questions in.

We will start off with our witnesses. Mr. Thompson, I'll get you to go first. All the presenters will have seven minutes as we move around the room. We have, as I said, five different witnesses today. If you need translation, it's on here, and you can pick up if there's any translation required.

Mr. Thompson, thank you for being here. I believe you're with the Assembly of First Nations. We look forward to your presentation.

Mr. Jonathan Thompson (Director, Social Development, Assembly of First Nations): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the committee as well for giving me some time this morning at the eleventh hour. We snuck in at the last minute to share some time with you this morning.

As most of you know, the AFN, the Assembly of First Nations, is the national organization representing first nation citizens in Canada, regardless of age, gender, or residence. I am the director of social development at AFN. Within the health and social secretariat we deal with a number of portfolios specific to our discussion this morning; however, we do deal with early childhood development, child care, the issue of special needs, FASD, and disabilities, just to name a few areas.

Many of our first nations people experience poverty in their early years. It's an issue that has had a lot of press over the last little while. We have provided copies to the committee of the 2002-2003 First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey. It's the summative document, not the entire document, but if anyone is interested in getting further information on the full report, please let me know.

That document and that research tell us that one in four first nations children lives in poverty, compared to one in six Canadian children. Over one-third of the homes in which first nations children live are overcrowded. There exists a direct correlation between lower family income, overcrowding, poor nutrition, lower levels of physical activity, and educational achievement among first nations children.

First nations children, we believe sincerely, deserve to be provided with safe and adequate food, water, housing, recreation, child care, and education since they are more likely to experience poor health and poor social and economic conditions later in life.

One way to improve the odds is to improve the financial situation of first nations families. The lack of child care and ECD services can prove to be, and are, important obstacles for first nations families.

Presently first nations families are benefiting from four federal programs. The current ECD programs are the aboriginal head start on reserve program, the aboriginal head start in urban and northern communities program, the first nations and Inuit child care initiative, and the INAC day care funding in Ontario and Alberta.

Some of the issues facing first nations children today with respect to ECD are of course limited resources. Resources are not only limited in the areas of capital, competitive wages, training, and culturally rooted ECD materials; since 1997-98, or for the last decade or so, there has also been an arbitrary 2% cap on spending increases for core services in first nations communities. This has had a devastating effect on the quality of programs and services for first nations people—not just for children, but for families in general.

Since 1996-97, health services and program budgets have been generally frozen at about 3%. The result of these caps is that first nations receive less than one-third of the average 6.6% increase that most Canadians enjoy through the Canada health and social transfers. First nations core program budgets, such as social development and capital facilities, have experienced budget numbers decreased by about 13% since just 1999-2000.

Today there are approximately 250 first nations without regulated child care. There is an important need for sustainable funding for child care and ECD services in general. Earlier this morning I heard mention of a suite of services, the notion that child care alone isn't enough. That's certainly something we firmly believe in, particularly in relation to the situation with the number of first nations children in care and the child and family services numbers that are now finally getting a little bit of attention, starting in the province of Alberta.

First nations are also dealing with a lot of structural and administrative barriers. Various layers to access resources often create confusion in roles and responsibilities among federal, provincial, and territorial governments. There's a lot of jurisdictional wrangling that first nations administrative bodies have to deal with; I don't think mainstream Canada deals with it as much, or on as regular a basis.

Over the last couple of years we have been working, or trying to work, with the federal government on ECD, or early learning and child care. We've dealt with the single-window discussion. We've dealt with the early learning and child care initiative under the past government, which had identified some funding for first nations.

•(1050)

We were actually getting ready, or at least we thought we were, to implement some of these initiatives regionally across the country. But that's not to say that the work has been lost, because we're continuing to try to figure out how best to provide coordinated complementary children's programs and services. The ECD discussion is still alive, and we are certainly attempting to move the discussion forward.

There have been setbacks in the past, as I mentioned. ELCC was contemplating some machinery of government changes at the time. With the change of government, it went by the wayside and we came back to the notion of ECD. Okay, we're really talking about the same thing. It's all about providing those programs and services in a coordinated and efficient fashion for our kids.

At one point, \$100 million was identified for children in northern communities that came out of the first ministers discussions in Kelowna. This was lost, and certainly the new Child Care Spaces Initiative has no mention of specific funding for first nations either.

Also, I think there was a large concern that the department heard in their consultations across the country with respect to sustainability of the Child Care Spaces Initiative. That was certainly something we looked at as an obstacle to that particular initiative's success.

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds, Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Jonathan Thompson: Okay, thank you.

But as I mentioned before, we are moving forward. In consultation with first nations stakeholders and the federal government, we have developed a first nations ECD policy framework that includes the principles of child development, culture and language, special needs, program implementation, jurisdiction, partnerships, and certainly accountability.

I'll skip to the end and quickly mention a couple of things that we'd like to see with respect to Bill C-303. While there is an advisory council for the ministers, we'd certainly like to see sit on that council a first nations representative who can bring some specific expertise with respect to first nations child care issues.

Earlier this morning I heard mention of an exception for Quebec, and perhaps similar language or a similar clause could be used to ensure that funding is set aside specifically for first nations, if such an approach is presently happening with the Province of Quebec.

Thank you.

•(1055)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thompson, for being here.

We're now going, via teleconference, to Nancy Matychuk. You have seven minutes, please.

Ms. Nancy Matychuk (As an Individual): My name is Nancy Matychuk and I very much appreciate the opportunity to address this committee today regarding Bill C-303.

I am not affiliated with any official organization. I am simply expressing an opinion that I believe fairly represents many other Canadian parents who are affected by funding decisions the government makes concerning child care.

As a young adult I trained to work in child care and worked in a day care centre for a few years after completing college. I worked with a wonderful, caring, well-trained, committed group of women; I felt great affection for the children in my care, but I knew even then that if I were blessed with children, I didn't want them to spend their days in that environment. I am now the mother of five children; I have been at home with them since the eldest was born 15 years ago, while my husband has earned our income.

I think I can assume all of us sitting in this room are united in desiring the very best for the children of our society. They are dependent on us to provide the best care and early learning opportunities available. The best I have been able to give my children is to keep them home with me during those important years, and I would recommend it enthusiastically to anyone who would ask. As little ones, they are designed to be dependent on us, and I believe pushing them into premature independence is not the healthiest way for them to grow and learn. I believe that parents at home provide the most creative, specialized, calm, secure environment, and children are allowed to develop at their own unique rate through a natural unhurried process, gradually becoming confident, independent, intelligent, curious, and socially secure.

I know many will disagree with my ideal of the early childhood experience. Many will also find trying to live on one income impractical. I quite understand that not everyone wants to live the way my family lives; they do not wish to forgo breakfast cereal, vacations, cable TV, and visits to the orthodontist.

While we may disagree on what is ideal, it is certainly not my place to make decisions for anyone but my own family. Each parent has the right and responsibility to decide what their own family situation should look like. I do not need you to affirm my choices any more than you need me to affirm yours, but I wonder if we can agree that our different opinions both have validity and are well represented among the taxpaying population.

Just as another family's choices are none of my business, our individual choices are also not government business. You might assume that I want my government to say parents should try to stay at home with their children in the early years, but I don't. I most sincerely do not want my government to make any pronouncements about what is or isn't good parenting. They're in the business of governing, not parenting. Just as I would not presume to make a decision about what is best for someone else's child, the government should not presume to intrude in the business of parenting. They are not equipped for the intricacies of the task.

I believe any bill that pertains to parental issues must intrinsically provide for freedom and diversity. What message does the government send if they have only parents who work outside the home and use day care? Are they the only ones worthy of government assistance, by virtue of their taxable income? Are they the only ones struggling to pay the bills and be good parents? What about families that sacrifice much materially to care for their children at home? What about parents who both work, staggering their work hours so that one of them is home with the children? What about parents who invite extended family to live with them to help with the care of the children? Do these kinds of situations not warrant the government's notice?

The Chair: Did we lose the connection there? We did.

Okay, we're going to move on. We'll have to come back and finish that up, for the sake of time.

Oh, she's back? Houston, do we have contact?

• (1100)

Ms. Nancy Matychuk: Should I continue?

The Chair: Go ahead. I believe we have you back on the screen now.

Thank you. You have three minutes left.

Ms. Nancy Matychuk: Does the government only value lifestyle choices that lead to taxable income? In a country that so values diversity, why would we want everybody to embrace one method of caring for and teaching our young children? Should we not instead reward and recognize the creativity and sacrifice of all parents by helping whoever has financial need?

I appreciate the attempt to help young families with their financial challenges, because it affirms the importance of our children to society at large. At the risk of using a cliché, they are the future of the country, but to parents, they are more than that. To those of us who work in the trenches, civilizing the next generation, they are not a concept or an ideal. We are the ones who fret and worry about how they will make their way in the world. We are the ones listening to them, putting our arms around them, and looking into their eyes trying to understand the inner workings of their minds. We are the ones strategizing how to handle discipline issues and motivate them to reach for lofty goals. Our motives are pure and have nothing to do with money. To us, their parents, they are not the impersonal entity of the future. To us they are much more. They are everything; for them we would do anything. Who is better qualified to decide what is best for them?

I ask my government to provide funding to families who have financial need, regardless of why they are in financial need. Rather than only helping those who require a child care space, I ask you to trust individual families with the details of how they care and provide for their children.

The Chair: You have about 15 seconds.

Ms. Nancy Matychuk: They are uniquely qualified to do that.

Are they in financial need because they can't find a job that pays very well? Is it because they're living on one income? Is it because they need to pay someone to care for their children? Is it because they need to move to a bigger place to accommodate a new baby?

Does it matter? Is it not enough to recognize that their position as parents places them in financial need? So help their children, all of them

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to Dr. Lazar, who will give us his presentation now.

Professor Harvey Lazar (Adjunct Professor, School of Public Administration, As an Individual): Good morning, Mr. Chair. Bonjour.

I understood that I might have slightly more than seven minutes. Is that correct, or am I on the seven minute restriction also?

The Chair: For the sake of time this morning, do the best you can. I realize that the clerk indicated you could have a few more minutes, but do what you can to get it in in that seven minutes or slightly over.

Prof. Harvey Lazar: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have two preliminary comments. The first is to confirm that I'm here in a personal capacity. The second is to say to the committee that my research focuses on federalism more than on child care and early learning, so my remarks will mainly be focused on the intergovernmental dimensions of Bill C-303.

I understand that the sponsors of this bill are relying on the federal spending power as the constitutional basis for what would otherwise be seen as an area of mainly provincial legislative competence under the Constitution. I am also aware that legal counsel from HRSDC has already testified concerning this spending power. I am in broad agreement with their interpretation of its scope and nature.

I would add, however, that there have long been political—I emphasize the word “political”—differences of opinion concerning the appropriate use of the spending power, and these differences reflect varied perspectives about the nature of the federation itself. In recent decades, these differences have led to several admittedly unsuccessful efforts at constitutional reform that would have placed some limitations on this power. In a similar vein, when the non-constitutional 1999 social union framework agreement was negotiated by federal, provincial, and territorial governments, Quebec excluded, it included some limitations—modest limitations, it must be said—on the federal spending power.

My only point in this regard is that notwithstanding the constitutional support for a federal spending power, its use is politically sensitive, and judging the appropriateness of conditions attached to federal transfers often involves shades of grey, rather than black and white. That is why, of course, the use of the federal spending power typically entails consultation and negotiation with provinces and territories.

Turning to the bill itself, it appears to be modelled in important respects on the Canada Health Act. I have three principal sets of concerns regarding Bill C-303. The first is that the bill is not easy to interpret. For that reason, its impact is uncertain. For example, subclause 5(4) requires that the early learning and child care program of a province or territory will "...ensure that all children resident in the province or territory are equally entitled to early learning and child care services that are appropriate to their needs".

This might reasonably be interpreted, at least in my view, as disqualifying the early learning and child care programs of most, if not all, provinces and territories because they almost certainly do not meet that definition of universality. I note in this regard that this definition appears to go beyond the definition in the 2005 agreements that the previous government entered into with provincial governments. You might look, for example, at the agreement between Canada and Manitoba dated April 29, 2005.

Similarly, the bill requires that a provincial or territorial program be of "high quality". This requirement is linked to subclause 5(3), where the concept of quality is developed more fully. Whether in fact any province or territory could satisfy this criterion, however, is an open question. Recent research conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Research on Public Policy suggests, for example, that the quality of early learning and child care services in Quebec is uneven at best. While Quebec is not to be subject to the conditions of this bill unless it opts in, I mention this only because even that province, which is generally assumed to be a leader in this field, might have some difficulty fully satisfying this criterion.

My second broad comment is that the bill is intrusive relative to provinces and territories. Apart from its grandfathering provisions, the bill precludes for-profit child care delivery, and in so doing is reaching deeply into provincial jurisdiction in its efforts to discourage for-profit delivery. You've heard from at least one province, probably two, to that effect. I believe that this bill goes further than the Canada Health Act, as the Canada Health Act does not, at least in my judgment, preclude private delivery of publicly insured services.

My third category of comment is that Bill C-303 is one-sided relative to the provinces and territories, apparently ignoring the federal-provincial-territorial consultation processes called for in the social union framework agreement when Ottawa wishes to amend an existing federal-provincial agreement. Bill C-303 imposes new obligations on provinces and territories without offering incremental transfers, or even assurances that current transfers will be maintained.

• (1105)

I would point out in this regard that the federal government, initially through federal-provincial agreements for hospital and medical services, created financial incentives for provinces to expand vastly their public delivery systems of health care services.

Once this was established, the federal government gradually reduced its share of health care spending to the point of causing a huge federal-provincial-territorial brouhaha a few years ago. The federal government has since increased, very substantially, its cash transfers to the provinces and territories for health care, but this took several years of difficult and protracted negotiation.

I recognize that since this bill was not introduced by a member of the government, it cannot, or at least should not, contain spending commitments. Parenthetically, I would say whether it actually does contain spending commitments is a separate issue that I will leave to the lawyers to debate, but I do think the committee needs to consider how to ensure that the federal fiscal commitment is a long-term one in the event that provinces and territories stand ready to move decisively in the direction that the bill intends. Were I a provincial official, I would be very skeptical of basing the expansion of my public sector on federal financial incentives unless there was a strong long-term federal political and legislative commitment on the funding side. History teaches that if provinces do not do so, they can be left holding the bag.

On a related point, in the event that transfers are to be withheld or withdrawn, subsection 14(2) of the Canada Health Act at least requires the federal authorities to consult with the affected province before acting, whereas Bill C-303 appears not to afford the same opportunity to a provincial or territorial government before punitive action is taken. In this sense, Bill C-303 is more arbitrary than the Canada Health Act.

This brings me to my last point, Mr. Chair. Put simply, it's hard for Parliament, acting on its own, to legislate effectively—and I would emphasize the word "effectively"—in the federal-provincial arena when the federal government and the provincial governments are not directly involved.

Perhaps the intent of the bill is simply to send a symbolic message and help motivate provinces and territories to encourage the federal government to return to the bargaining table. If the bill is enacted and that is its only effect, I would applaud that result. However, given the stated policies of the federal government in this policy area, I am stymied as to how, as a practical matter, this could be brought about.

If this bill is enacted but does not lead to renewed federal-provincial-territorial negotiations, it's possible that it will just sit there, with the federal authorities enforcing it very lightly. After all, Bill C-303 does not require—and I emphasize the word "require"—the Governor in Council to withhold payments when conditions are not satisfied.

It's also possible that the federal government will enforce it, leading to cuts in federal transfers for child care.

What do I conclude? First, the impact of Bill C-303 is uncertain, with the risk of unintended consequences. Second, given the lack of commitment to new fiscal resources; given the lack of intergovernmental consultation processes called for by SUFA, the social union framework agreement; given the lack of a consultation procedure for a province or territory before its transfers are withheld; and given the ambiguities pertaining to its interpretation, Bill C-303 could create a new flashpoint in federal-provincial-territorial relations.

That completes my opening remarks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Lazar, for being flexible and working within that timeframe.

We're now going to move to the next group of witnesses. I have Mr. Davis and Mr. Thiessen. Gentlemen, you have seven minutes.

Reverend Jay Davis (Barrie Christian Council, Mapleview Community Church, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

Let me begin by saying it's a privilege for both my colleague, Jeff Thiessen, and me to be here with you this morning. We're fairly new to the discussion at this level, for sure.

I will attempt to try to speak to you regarding some of the grassroots situations. Both Jeff and I, over a number of years, have put a number of resources toward early childhood care in trying to ensure that our children are very well cared for.

I am a minister in Barrie, Ontario, where my wife and I began a church ten years ago. We established this place of faith in a very fast-growing community, and quite quickly we realized that the best way to touch a community is to touch children—to really impact their lives, and get involved with them.

Barrie has a slogan that says that the city is the people. It's a great mission statement. Obviously there are all kinds of discussions regarding mission and vision statements out there, and Barrie is a prosperous, growing community—there's no question about that—but behind the growing city there are absolutely a number of growing needs that we began to encounter at a very grassroots level. My thinking over the last ten years has been that federally, provincially, and locally, governments have to really begin to understand what is going on at a very grassroots level, and there are some serious needs.

The scope of attempting to meet the needs is wide and varied and needs to be at least considered. There are many different options for touching the grassroots people, the people who really need help.

Economic and family vitality is absolutely what we're about. We are trying to focus on that. We are absolutely trying to do all we can to interact with families at a very base need. Our own assembly.... Again, I'll speak maybe three words: economic and family vitality, adequacy...whatever we do regarding the children of our country and our communities has to be adequate. That means, in my world, that we're not looking for a bottomless money pit, but we need to assess the individuals who have needs. There needs to be some kind of consideration given to transferring funds to places and people with different needs and different challenges.

I see this as a very trying.... Put aside the political; this is trying. We need to help families. In fact this week, maybe even today, at my daughter's own school in Barrie there have been two suicides in the past two weeks—two, by young people, and possibly even a death pact. I'll be waiting to hear of a third child from the same school. For me, my daughter attends that school, and we try to impact and influence the community just down the street.

We have to do better. We just have to get involved and do more, not just based upon economic truths and realities, but what is absolutely going to help encourage our children to resist the challenges and the crises that they are facing as they grow older.

It's monumental, in my mind. Adequacy becomes absolutely important. I don't believe it's an either/or thing. Parents who go out to work shouldn't be penalized for that. The single demographic in

our own community is growing by leaps and bounds. There is a need to get out there, but you shouldn't penalize those who are staying at home and trying to raise their children, so there should be something more inclusive, something larger than what I see here.

Third, I'd like to consider the reliability. We need to begin to explore options—trustworthy places, whether in family or in non-profit, trustworthy places where we can begin to allocate funding that's going to make a difference. I would even suggest that maybe, on just rationally sound thinking, we would consider even some faith initiatives out there that have proven track records—somewhere we could begin to explore and see some really worthy people and places and non-profits that have supported the community over the years.

• (1115)

We need to create criteria and measuring sticks so that we can absolutely qualify that this is a good place or this is a good situation, and open up the doors to help at this grassroots level.

I believe that there are communities of faith out there, places and people, absolutely doing what you're looking for, but without any help of any kind. I applaud the government right now for the \$1,200 subsidy and all of that help, but we need to get bigger. We need to get larger in order to facilitate strong family units. We've got to get bigger. You've got to get out of the box and think big, and I know you're attempting to do that.

Again, we're fairly new at this. All I'm saying is that at a very grassroots level, we're doing all we can to assist families in our community, to help them and to encourage them. We have all kinds of infrastructure within our community, within our organization, that the city is having a hard time providing for. There are different ways to go about—

The Chair: You have one minute, sir.

Rev. Jay Davis: Oh, it was that fast, eh?

The Chair: You wouldn't believe how fast it goes.

Rev. Jay Davis: I'm a preacher, you know.

The Chair: I'm sure you get more time on Sunday mornings.

Rev. Jay Davis: Yes, I know. Not much, though—they're gone.

Well, the long and short of it is that even as parents, we need to be more proactive. I'd encourage this group of men and women who are making these decisions to really step beyond just the appearance of... I'll say government and politics and the agendas here, and really see the needs of these children. I know that's what you're here for. I understand that, but there is....

I've watched too many children, even in my own neighbourhood now, dying. We have to do something, and it has to be soon. It has to be impactful. It has to be powerful.

As a father and as somebody who's working at that grassroots level, I hope that we can find something that's really going to meet the need—really.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate the opportunity to come here and address this committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davis, as well.

We're now going to move to our last presenter, our last witness, and that is Ms. Tennier.

Mrs. Kate Tennier (As an Individual): Bill C-303 is flawed policy and flawed politics.

By the way, is there just one Liberal here? That's it?

Mr. Michael Savage: The other ones are coming and going.

Mrs. Kate Tennier: So there's only one.

The Chair: They're always around us. We can't get away from them. They're either coming or going.

Mrs. Kate Tennier: I am Kate Tennier, from Toronto.

I will attempt one more time to explain to the Liberals why the country is against Bill C-303. The first thing Canadians do when discussing state-controlled child care is to muse about why and how the Liberals got themselves into this mess. They often wonder if you really know what it and this bill are all about. The evidence indicates you may not.

By supporting this bill you are supporting the NDP, which in its rush to impose its will on the Canadian people has become a handmaiden to the corporate bottom line, not the servant of its citizens—particularly its most needy. The NDP has developed its views based on the polemics of Canada's funded day care activists, who are inspired, in part, by the OECD directive to “offer free day care” as a way to get mothers out to work. That is explicitly laid out in this document I hold before you.

In March 2006, I spoke with a Toronto day care policy administrator who told me that the city will pay the full \$18,000 day care fee for a mother to go out and earn \$18,000. If a mother felt she could provide better child care herself and wanted some of that money redirected to her for that purpose, he said that wouldn't be allowed and that it would be better for her to get a job.

Olivia Chow's first comment at a Toronto child care all-candidates meeting in January 2006 was that universal day care would be good for the economy. I subsequently wrote about it in a *Globe and Mail* op-ed piece. Aside from the fact that Quebec's experience renders Ms. Chow's economic analysis quite wrong, we are not seriously contemplating supporting a bill that has economic growth, not the betterment of family life, as its purported goal.

I testified here almost two years ago, to the day, about the destructiveness of a national day care program and why Canadians did not want it. Convinced you were right and that the people were wrong, you pushed ahead. On November 19, 2005, rallies were held in 17 cities from coast to coast demanding that parents' child care choices rest with them, not the state. This was the tipping point that turned Canadians against your plans to bring in national day care.

It was a pity that so few Liberals took the time to listen to Canadians, especially with so many citizens saying this would be the first time ever they would not be voting Liberal, an experience I described, myself, in a December 2005 *Toronto Star* article.

Following a few of the many now former Liberals you ignored, there was a rally leader in Ontario who had previously led the charge against Wal-Mart muscling its way into her community, a grandmother who ran the breastfeeding support group in her maritime town, and a young Toronto mother who was resolute in her determination to be the primary caregiver while living on a family income of less than \$35,000. She told me, “Kate, I was, and always have been, a Liberal, but not now. Liberals are no longer liberal and they simply do not speak for me.”

You ignored parents currently using day care centres who wanted a centre to meet their choice. You ignored Canadians—too many to count—who, accurately, do not equate early learning with day care centres.

My professional background is in education. I was a primary specialist teacher for many years. Not one shred of evidence supports the myth that children learn best in centres and preschools. Sweden found that out the hard way. Their education ministry issued a report in which they note that problems for young children actually increased with their move to early programmed learning.

You ignored a British Columbia parent, a card-carrying member of the Liberal Party, who stood in the voting booth for 15 minutes before making the agonizing decision to not vote for you. She simply couldn't allow her family to be treated like second-class citizens. You ignored the 90% of Canadians who rank day care centres as virtually their last choice. You ignored almost half the population whose children are in absolutely no form of outside care. You ignored the 85% of Canadians whose children are not even in day care centres. You ignored us all.

Finally, you ignored the truth. You ignored the research of Helen Ward, president of Kids First Parent Association of Canada, whose top-drawer analyses debunk every myth that national day care has been predicated on.

Why are you supporting the fantasy that the only thing preventing women from fulfilling their true destiny as stockbrokers, lawyers, and bank executives is the lack of day care? The truth—and you know it—is that the full impact of this program will be felt by women who will have the dubious pleasure of dropping their kids off at substandard care to take up their positions as low-paying service sector workers. Very few women are asking for the opportunity to release their inner Betty Friedans.

Finally, why are supporting the greatest NDP myth of all, the fantasy of the free lunch? The NDP are reluctant to give up their belief that obscenely expensive government programs don't cost us all dearly. Their response to families who don't want day care—also known as most of us—is that they don't have to use it. As Bev Smith brilliantly explained to a national CBC audience on March 26, the increased taxation required to fund these programs has the boomerang effect of forcing all parents into the market economy to cover its costs.

• (1120)

This is called the no-choice model. That women have gained control over their reproductive rights, only to lose decision-making power over who cares for their children, is an astounding irony that has been lost on very few of us.

The story goes that if you, the Liberals, get back into power, you won't be forced to fund this program, so there's no harm in passing this bill now. That's dangerous thinking, as it leaves the door open for some ill-informed Liberals to head down this no-win path once again.

Millions of Canadians have been galvanized by this issue, with support groups and networks springing up across the country as a direct response to your inability to listen to them. If you vote for this bill, the response will once again be swift and decisive. But if, on the other hand, you choose to support families, the engine that propels our country toward a bright future, in all their diversity—there's the word again—and in all the myriad ways they are currently and successfully raising their children, you'll be returning to your Liberal roots, and you will form the next government.

Notice the spike in Conservative support after the last budget, a budget that gave some help directly to parents. This could once again become the Liberal way.

Thank you.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tennier.

Now we're going to move to our MPs to ask questions. Our first questioner will be Mr. Savage.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Chair, one of the guests last week complained that when they're on video, they don't know who's speaking and where they come from, so I was going to suggest....

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's not a bad idea.

The first MP who will be asking questions, for those of you who are here via teleconference, will be Mr. Savage, with the Liberal Party.

We're going to have two five-minute rounds of questions right now.

Mr. Savage, it's your turn, sir.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses who have taken the time to come out and talk to us about this piece of legislation.

First of all, I'm a little puzzled. Is it Pastor Davis or Reverend Davis?

Rev. Jay Davis: Correct.

Mr. Michael Savage: Either or both?

I appreciate the fact that you came today.

By holding up a paper that talked about two suicides, are you suggesting that there's a connection with this bill?

Rev. Jay Davis: I'm suggesting that there's an absolute need to do something that's going to change the lives of our children, yes. We're all for that: changing the direction and whatever it takes to make sure this doesn't happen. Where it does not speak to the bill implicitly, it does have a connection for me, as I'm going down the street, to see that children need absolute care in our community.

Mr. Michael Savage: There's no indication that the two suicides were connected to either a lack of child care or family child care.

Rev. Jay Davis: For me, again, at a grassroots level, when I'm working with children and teens all the way through, there does appear to be a connection to the ability of families to care for their children.

Mr. Michael Savage: Okay.

Mr. Thompson, I noted with interest.... You gave us a lot of material. Are you for or against Bill C-303?

Mr. Jonathan Thompson: Essentially, what we would like to see, of course, as I mentioned earlier, is some consideration for targeting first nations funding in the area of child care, and if there is going to be an advisory body, having a first nations representative on that advisory council.

We would support it, I think, but with certain amendments to its present condition. Those are basically the two main points.

Mr. Michael Savage: You obviously indicated that there is a great need in the first nations communities for early learning and child care. Can you talk about what would have been available under the previous Liberal agreement and what would have been available if there was something under the Kelowna Accord that is not going to be available now? Can you give us the figures on that?

Mr. Jonathan Thompson: Actually, what I mentioned earlier was \$100 million for northern children and families that was coming out of Kelowna. There was a previous commitment of \$100 million that would have been targeted to south of 60, essentially, and that didn't materialize either.

When the agreements with the provinces died, there was, I believe, a certain number of dollars for people to transition back out of those agreements. And none of that was afforded to the first nations programs.

Mr. Michael Savage: What replaced them?

Mr. Jonathan Thompson: Nothing.

Mr. Michael Savage: Ms. Tennier, you've been active on this file. You've shown you didn't like the Liberal plan. You made that very clear and you were very active on that in an article on May 31, 2005, saying that "the government's plan to develop a regulated, universal day care system is unfair to the vast majority of families who want fair options".

You've also indicated that you're not a big fan of the Quebec model, which in many ways is what a lot of us advocate and what this bill is more or less patterned on and what our previous legislation was meant to pattern.

One of the issues you talk about not liking is the lack of options. We've heard from a number of witnesses from Quebec, who almost universally indicate that the Quebec model works quite well, not only in terms of cost, but in terms of choice.

This morning we heard from the Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance. One of the things the Library of Parliament has given us about it is that in fact there is lots of choice in Quebec; that in fact, according to the Library of Parliament, each centre "is independent and has the flexibility to adapt its services within the regulations established by the province"—each of the 700 centres.

So we have heard from a lot of people who tell us the Quebec model does, in fact, work. I wonder what your response to that is.

• (1130)

Mrs. Kate Tennier: First of all, Mr. Savage, you can ignore what I worked very hard to tell you today; that's your choice. The message is that a whole bunch of us, a whole whack of us have been life-long Liberals, and you alienated us. That's the first message.

Secondly, is the Quebec model giving equity to parents who choose to care for their children themselves? Could you answer that question, please?

Mr. Michael Savage: I'm asking the questions, and—

Mrs. Kate Tennier: —and I'm throwing it back. It's no, it doesn't work, because it doesn't give you full, equal choice. So that is your answer. There's no equality, no \$175 a week to parents who choose to care for their children themselves. That's roughly what the Quebec government is subsidizing directly to parents. So no, it doesn't work; there's no choice.

The Chair: That's all the time we have. We're going to have a second round.

Mr. Lessard, you have five minutes, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is fascinating to see the understanding people have both of the bill and the Quebec program.

I am speaking based on Ms. Matychuk's remarks, which are very important. She is a mother who is concerned with ensuring that her children get off to a good start in life. She and her spouse decided that one of them would stay at home, and she told us why. She seems afraid of the impact Bill C-303 could have on the willingness of a

parent to stay at home. That won't change anything. I would like to hear you on the topic.

At present, 54% of families have access to the Quebec child care system. The families that do not have access to it are the ones that have chosen not to use it. Some representatives from an early childhood development centre told us that they would like to preserve and improve the system. So they are not just the users who operate the system, but also representatives of private centres. Quebec has early childhood development centres in an institutional setting and in a family setting, which are supported by the institutional centres. Quebec also has private day care centres as well as families who choose to stay at home.

Are we helping these families? Yes, more and more. We are negotiating with the federal government with a view to repatriating part of the funds that were earmarked for the parental leave program, but that were not used there. That program helped increase support for families with young children by allowing one of the two parents to remain at home for a year or a year and a half, while receiving an income. That helps get off to a better start. It is not perfect, but that contribution has led to a spectacular increase in the birth rate over the past two years.

Ms. Matychuk, how could this bill have a negative impact on parents who would like to remain at home?

[English]

Ms. Nancy Matychuk: Because there's only so much money, and I would imagine that a program of this kind would be very expensive. So I'm concerned, when a family like mine is already struggling to make ends meet, that we are going to end up paying more taxes to pay for a program like this.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Your concern is money-based. You are afraid of sharing the expenses with others, in the same way as everyone shares expenses for health care, based on a program. It is a policy choice, and I understand your argument.

Mr. Davis, I am trying to follow your reasoning and to understand your opinion of Bill C-303. Are you for or against it? You talked about Bill C-303 by sharing with us a life experience based on your position, which is considerable, but that did not lead us to understand your opinion on the bill. What is it?

• (1135)

[English]

Rev. Jay Davis: In reading it over, I just don't believe that it goes far enough. I think there needs to be more diversity. I do believe it has some valid points and some opportunity for success. I don't believe it goes far enough. There needs to be a greater option—

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Lessard: Can you give us an example?

[English]

Rev. Jay Davis: For instance, getting funds to the families that choose to stay at home. Right now the system appears to be working, and the \$1,200 subsidy, getting it to.... A choice. I'm looking for a choice, and I just don't think it goes far enough, in my opinion.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Lessard and Mr. Davis. That's all the time we have. We're going to have to catch you on the second round.

We have Ms. Chow. Five minutes, please.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Canada ranks among the worst in the world for unhealthy children, experts say. This is a question for Mr. Davis. Apparently, we are at the bottom of the list of developed nations for children's health, according to the Children's Commissioner of England. The report quotes a March UNICEF report that shows that the Netherlands and Sweden rank first and second.

If you look at suicide rates for children in Canada, between five and 14 years old it was 0.7 per 100,000 children, and that's 22nd out of 29 OECD countries. So our kids are in trouble.

From UNICEF, in another study in 2005 about child poverty in wealthy countries, Canada ranked 19th out of 26 nations, with one out of six children living in poverty. So our children are not doing very well in terms of health, suicide rates, poverty, etc.

Last week we heard from a professor and he spoke on behalf of a group of doctors, and he talked about Dr. Fraser Mustard and others, neuroscientists, who said that early detection of learning disorders and learning disabilities for kids is really critical, and that one way is through decent early learning and child care programs. When you have high-quality child care programs, then a child will learn about group dynamics, about developing relationships with friends; they will come out of isolation and connect with each other. And if they have some kind of learning disability, because you can detect it early enough before the child goes to school, then the school can also connect with the child care educator so that there's a smooth transition.

This is why we are saying that early learning child care programs are critically important for our kids, especially those kids you were talking about, who have hidden problems that become full blown when they're teenagers and they end up committing suicide or they get in trouble.

How would having some kind of program like that be counter-productive for the well-being of our children?

Rev. Jay Davis: Again, I'm more bipartisan, in that I'm not thinking it is counterproductive, I'm just saying I don't believe it goes far enough. Yes, we need these programs, we need educational places. I'm not against that. I'm saying you have to go farther because there are families at home that can get them places and encourage them in situations and get them the help and encouragement apart from just the institutional locations. It's not that I'm opposed, or saying let's not do this at all; I'm saying let's go further.

I don't think this bill goes as far as I would like it to go. I'm advocating better institutions, but it can't be just that alone, because there are too many families that will not go into the institutional place for that encouragement and help. They won't be there. You have to create at least a broader picture of how to get involved in children's lives.

Again, just grassroots, in talking with parents, hundreds and literally thousands over the last number of years, it has to go further.

• (1140)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Sweden has a very strong parental care for young children. You can get extended paid parental leave, to be used in blocks of time up until the child is eight years old. This allows parents to take time off when the child needs them, reduce their working hours to six per day instead of eight during much of the child's pre-school years, along with providing an incentive for fathers to take a greater share of parental leave. These reforms are good sense, and that's something perhaps this committee could look at. It's not just maternal, but parental leave, and it includes the father and mother and gives more flexibility. That's something you would support.

Rev. Jay Davis: There are a lot of things I'd support if the bottom line is it's changing a child, but it has to be verifiable. You have to validate it at some level with the parents you're in communication with. I have to see it working, and not just statistics—not just Sweden, not just Denmark; it has to work here. You can't just adopt something from another country; you have to adapt it. We talk a lot about it, but it's not good enough; we have to go further.

The Chair: That's all the time we have. We're going to move to the final questioner of this round: Mr. Chong, for five minutes.

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

I want to direct my remarks and questions to Professor Harvey Lazar, from Queen's University.

Before I ask my questions, I think we all acknowledge the need for early learning and child care. There are some out there who believe that it's best delivered by the federal government using the federal spending power, and there are those out there who believe it's best delivered by the provinces as part of their intra vires responsibilities. But regardless of whether you believe it's best delivered by the Government of Canada or by individual provinces, this bill is flawed and should not be supported. That's my view. In other words, even if you believe the federal government should set Canada-wide goals and principles for social policy, even if you like the idea of a federally driven national child care program, this bill is flawed for two reasons, I believe.

The first reason is that it flies in the face of and contradicts the social union framework agreement that the previous Liberal government signed with the provinces, with the exception of Quebec. It flies in its face in terms of the idea of accountability that underlies the agreement and in terms of the process by which the federal government would engage in social policy in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

I'm wondering, Professor Lazar, if you would comment on that aspect of this bill, and then I have a second question for you as well.

Prof. Harvey Lazar: You said it was flawed because it was not consistent with the provisions of the social union framework agreement, as I understand it. Did you have a second point, or was that it?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, the second point I have has to do with section 4 of the agreement, which exempts Quebec from all the provisions of the agreement. If you're familiar with it, I'd like you to draw parallels between this and what in the Westminster Parliament has been called the West Lothian question.

In other words, we set up a situation where members of Parliament from Quebec would not have a say in the standards and principles of the provision of day care in the province of Quebec, yet would have a say in the standards and principles of provision of child care in the other nine provinces, and this is somewhat of a problem in terms of the role of members of Parliament from that province.

Prof. Harvey Lazar: On the first question, as you noted, provinces, territories, and the federal government did sign a social union framework agreement, in 1999, with the exception of Quebec. I'm not sure if Nunavut ever actually signed the agreement; it was not a separate territory at that time. I think it's clear that the social union framework agreement requires the federal government to give notice and enter into consultations with provinces and territories if they want to change a provision. As I indicated in my opening remarks, I think the bill is clearly flawed in the sense that it ignores that agreement. That is one of the reasons I thought that provincial governments would not look kindly on Bill C-303.

Going to your second question, about the West Lothian concept, it's a good subject for academic debate. I could go on for some time about this. Suffice it to say that this has not posed significant problems in Canada in terms of the way our democratic institutions work—for example, members of Parliament from Quebec vote on amendments to the Canada Pension Plan even though Quebec has a separate pension plan. There are one or two other examples. It would not create significant problems for the governing of the country if we do not have an extensive number of provisions of this type, but the more that provisions of this type are added to the governance of the country, the more this concern could be raised that members of Parliament from a particular province are voting on issues that don't affect their province.

It's not an issue I would push at the moment. I don't think this is a principal concern for this bill. But conceptually I think the argument is correct.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong. That's all the time we have.

We're going to move to our second round of five-minute questions.

Mr. Savage, five minutes, sir.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you, Chair.

I want to go back to Mr. Thompson and talk about what we need for first nations children.

We've just received these documents and there is a lot to go through. You talk about the cost of neglect. You outlined the need for

systematic reform. There is something in here about \$450 million; I'm not sure where I saw that. But do you have a specific recommendation of what first nations children need as a monetary investment for a specific plan?

Mr. Jonathan Thompson: Thank you.

We do have specific and very detailed research. The document you have in front of you relates to the child welfare situation. That is referring to the Wen:de series of reports for first nations child welfare agencies. It speaks to the main missing component, and that is the ability of first nations agencies to provide prevention.

The Minister of Indian Affairs recently announced \$15.3 million for the province of Alberta first nations child welfare agencies. That is in line with the numbers we have come up with through the Wen:de research, which I believe in the first year calls for something in the neighbourhood of \$109 million—I don't have the numbers in front of me.

When it comes to child care, we do not have as good an evidentiary base to target the amount, although we do talk about the number of communities that have no regulated child care whatsoever. With child welfare, the numbers are very clear; they are a little less so in the area of child care.

We're looking at the need to get a more coordinated approach to the provision of children's services. We have Health Canada doing something with head start. We have HRSDC doing something specifically with child care. We have INAC doing something in Ontario and Alberta with child care and the urban and reserve program. One of the things we're certainly trying to do, which we were trying to do within the ELCC initiative, is to get a more coordinated approach to the provision of these programs and expand them, as well. The decision to look just at those programs in terms of ELCC was taken unilaterally. There certainly are other programs that could probably be lumped in that could help support the family in a more comprehensive and efficient manner.

• (1150)

Mr. Michael Savage: Okay, I appreciate that.

Are you in discussions now with government officials about how to implement this?

Mr. Jonathan Thompson: Yes, we are. We're working with HRSDC, Indian and Northern Affairs, Health Canada, and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

Pastor Davis, one of the enjoyable things about being a member of Parliament is meeting people of different faith communities and listening to their views, whether we agree on all the issues or not. And it's interesting to see people like you, who come before a parliamentary committee and who perhaps are not used to the political cut and thrust, who are here because of a genuine interest in trying to promote some ideas. There are all kinds of politics involved in politics, and sometimes people get caught up in that.

You talked at one point—I was writing this down—about the need to explore “trustworthy places” for children. Does that sound like something you would have said? Would I have captured that correctly?

Rev. Jay Davis: Many people have said that I have said many things—so yes.

Mr. Michael Savage: And you've been very honest.

Rev. Jay Davis: I've tried to be.

Mr. Michael Savage: What you're saying is that you're not opposed to this bill so much as you want more for children—more assistance, more help, more guidance for children. I know a lot of people who would agree with that but who would see well-trained workers and regulated child care spaces as being that place, as being ideal to explore as a trustworthy place for children to go.

My sense is that you would say that could be the place, but lots of places might fall under that category. Is that right?

Rev. Jay Davis: Absolutely. In fact, at this moment in time we as a faith community are trying to build a safe environment for children to participate in this community. It's a \$6.5 million project. So we're not opposed to that. But as a parent, I know this too: no one can pay any institution to love my child enough. If I desire to have my child at home....

I'm not looking to diss the institutional side of things. And maybe the \$1,200 does not go far enough when you're looking at absolute needs of people I'm working with, the working class, the working poor, the low-income people. Maybe that's not enough either. All I'm throwing out here is that I want to see things get better overall, and it just doesn't appear that this bill will provide the solutions I'm looking for.

Mr. Michael Savage: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Mr. Savage. Your time is up.

Ms. Barbot.

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Davis, unfortunately, I wasn't here and... Is there a problem? Can you hear me?

[English]

Rev. Jay Davis: Yes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I was unable to hear your presentation. You said that the child care system was good and that you had nothing against a system like that, but that this does not go far enough. I have the impression that you are talking instead about a stay-at-home-mother salary program for women who decide to keep their children at home. Are these not two separate issues? On one hand, there are child care centres that meet the needs of some, and on the other, there are assistance programs for parents who want to stay at home. Do we really need to consider these two problems together?

It took Quebec 35 years to get the current child care system. Nevertheless, efforts are underway elsewhere to improve the situation for parents. More specifically, there are measures designed to help parents who have children, like programs that enable them to leave the workforce for a certain amount of time, up to a year.

What do you think about this?

[English]

Rev. Jay Davis: What do I think about this? I don't mean to be redundant in any kind of way, but I think we have to discover something that works.

If this is something that can truly be linked together, I think it will be more positive. I don't like to see visions that go a different direction. It's very complicated when two different streams of thought are going. I personally would like to see something come under one focus to see it more broad-based, more wide open, whether that be partly involving institutions and educational centres as well as somehow some component that would involve parents making the choice to raise their child and have support. This would be especially among low-income families—I don't know the technically proper word there—who I work with who want to raise their children according to their values, their principles, their core belief systems. There needs to be a component in that.

There's a way to do that—although don't ask me how. I believe, I really do believe, that with hard work, there will be a solution that answers both in an equitable fashion. Where I am, we're working on that all the time. We're working on equitable solutions for challenging situations, crisis management, and all kinds of things, on an ongoing, daily basis where we are a facilitating ministry.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: I wanted to know how you would do that. In Quebec, when my son was born 35 years ago, we tried to set up a program like that. After all of these years, this is the result we obtained, and we are very proud of it. If, within the next 35 years, you come up with something that is quite broad-based, that you want, that's great.

I'd like to ask Ms. Tennier a question. Is your opposition to child care centres a question of principle, a way of punishing the Liberals, or is it really that, in your opinion, the Quebec system as it stands is really not good and there is nothing that can be done with it?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You have one minutes, Ms. Tennier.

[English]

Mrs. Kate Tennier: I'm sorry, what was your question?

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot: Is your opposition to child care centres a question of principle—according to which children must be with their families—or do you really have concrete complaints against the system as it is run in Quebec?

[English]

Mrs. Kate Tennier: I've used full-time child care myself, and I've run a gender-equity career day at the school that I last worked at, so I'm all for that. But I would not put my child in a day care. I saw the best of the best in Toronto, and it's not good enough for my children. I would not put them in a day care centre. If that's the choice of person B, that's what they can do. But we need to have equality of funding. That is what we've said all the way along.

My husband and I wanted to share the child care duties, so he worked on the weekend; I went in early. Those kinds of situations are not being helped by this. We would be sacrificing so that others could have more than their share, and if we go to this hugely bureaucratic day care system, which.... Listen, the NICHD, which did one of the only longitudinal studies in the world on day cares, has come out saying there is a small increase in behavioural problems that is still noted by grade six.

So to answer both, no. Choice—choice is what Liberals are supposed to be about, and that's what we're about.

Also, to your point, as an educator, I know it is not always the best option for children.

Thank you.

[Translation]

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

Thank you, Ms. Barbot.

We will now move on to Ms. Chow.

[English]

Ms. Olivia Chow: This is for Mr. Thompson. If we have universally accessible child care for first nations children, especially for special needs kids; available in northern and remote communities; culturally sensitive, developed by the first nations communities themselves; with adequate funding that is sustained and from one source, rather than five, six, ten different project bases, with no core funding; holistic, with funding for building infrastructure; coordinated, so that it is a wraparound service with parents involved sometimes, and other times, if they work, they may not be.... Having that kind of vision, if we could do it, would it make a dent on the number of kids, the 27,000 first nations children who are now in care or being taken because of any number of reasons? Would that really help?

Mr. Jonathan Thompson: Yes.

One of the things that document also talks about, though, is that there is a multitude of things that probably need to be brought to support the family. That would be one, and that would definitely help. But when you look at the level of poverty across the first nation communities and the number of multiple problems that many families face, they would also need to be able to access other family support services to deal with drug and alcohol and substance abuse and that sort of thing, parenting.

But yes, absolutely.

• (1200)

Ms. Olivia Chow: And poverty, clean water. A third of the kids don't have clean water.

We have an amendment. The person who proposed the bill, Denise Savoie, was very clear right from the beginning that home child care really should be part of this bill—including aboriginals, spelling it out very clearly. So having this amendment, and this bill being one of the solutions—not the be-all or end-all—would you support those kinds of approaches?

Mr. Jonathan Thompson: Oh, I'd have to see the amendment first, but it sounds like you're on the right track, yes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Thank you.

I have another question for whoever wants to pick it up.

It's quite expensive to have parents stay at home. The direct cost would be.... Right now, the rate of maternity and parental benefits is about 55% of the regular pay up to about \$413 per week. That covers the first year of a child's life and it costs about \$2.7 billion to Canadian workers and businesses. If you multiply that by six, it would come to about \$16 billion per year, cover only about 60% of all parents with newborn babies. So if you want to cover all families, it would cost about \$27 billion per year to Canadian taxpayers.

We also estimate that if all mothers with children under the age of six were to leave the labour force, the employment in Canada would shrink by 7.5%. In the long run, it would cost the Canadian economy upwards of \$83 billion per year.

If you're looking at cost to the economy plus cost to taxpayers, it is substantial. I don't know whether anyone wants to respond to that.

Mrs. Kate Tennier: You are so off the mark. Why are you against the \$18,000 for this day care spot in Toronto going to that young single mom? That's what it's about. Why are you against equality?

Why would I want to go out of the labour force if somebody pays me? I wanted to work. I wanted to work for a certain number of years when my child was.... You are really insulting women. This is not what we're talking about. We are talking about equality for mothers and fathers for the 13, 14, and 15 different choices that are now working for parents. Why you can't honour that is what Canadians simply don't get.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Perhaps, Mr. Chair—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): You have 30 seconds.

[English]

Ms. Olivia Chow: Yes.

I never supported the former Premier of Ontario, Mike Harris, forcing single mothers back to work. It's called workfare, and they have to be torn away. If we actually pick the universal child care benefit and put it into the child tax benefit, that single mother that we are talking about would get far more money, and it would not be taxable. That is something we hope the Conservative government will do.

Mrs. Kate Tennier: You seem to be deciding—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Yves Lessard): Thank you, Ms. Chow and Ms. Tennier.

We will now go on to Mr. Brown and Mr. Lake.

[English]

Mr. Patrick Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We'll be splitting our time very briefly in the five minutes we have.

I have a question for Pastor Davis. What I liked in your comments was about the broad range of child care services that we need to have.

My concern with this bill is that it's an essentially mandated, cookie-cutter formula. I want to know, from the work you do, your church and the charitable community, do you get a sense that everyone you encounter works nine to five and they all require government day care? Do you ever run across people who work nights, who have shift work, or choose to be at home? In your experiences you mentioned low-income individuals you work with. Do you get a sense that there is a broad range of needs?

• (1205)

Rev. Jay Davis: Absolutely. That's where I guess I default again to saying we need to have a group of people who are looking out of the box. The people I'm in contact with on a regular basis are all over the map, from shift work to retail, with all kinds of challenges. It's so diverse. I guess that was my concern as I went through Bill C-303. The real roots may not even be economic at the foundational level. I mean, there needs to be funding, but the roots of the family needs, at least the ones I'm working with on a daily basis, are so diverse that it's too complicated to simply say "Here's this plan and here's this plan; make your life fit into it." Ah, it's so challenging.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Thanks, Pastor.

Mr. Mike Lake: I have a question for Ms. Matychuk. Could you give us a snapshot of the past five years of your family's taxable income?

Ms. Nancy Matychuk: It has probably hovered around \$40,000, give or take.

Mr. Mike Lake: Maybe you can tell us a bit about the sacrifices your family has had to make to ensure that you could make the choice to have a parent stay home.

Ms. Nancy Matychuk: I guess we live differently from a lot of people. We don't have a lot of luxuries in our life, but I have to say we don't really consider them sacrifices. We really enjoy having our children with us, so they don't feel like sacrifices, but we certainly live quite a bit differently from a lot of people in our community.

Mr. Mike Lake: We heard Mr. Lessard earlier today using the phrase "if you don't want to use it, you don't have to" in regard to child care. A lot of people say that about the Liberal plan, but what they don't say is that you do have to pay for it. To illustrate, if we

wanted to save time and cut out the middleman, you could simply go down to the day care where your neighbours take their kids and you and your husband could write a cheque to cover part of the costs of their day care. How does that make you feel?

Ms. Nancy Matychuk: That's very frustrating. If my husband and I are taxed at a greater rate, and I believe that a program like this would put a greater tax burden on everybody in the country, then my choice is removed. I'm forced into the workforce even when I don't believe that's the best thing for our family.

Mr. Mike Lake: In the earlier session today we heard that many of the witnesses spoke in favour of the bill and almost all of them suggested that this is just a start and basically the funding must follow. One of the witnesses suggested that this funding might be in the neighbourhood of \$20 million, which is consistent with Olivia Chow's numbers, if you calculate them out.

I did want to comment on one more thing. With the UCCB—I calculated it out at one point—your family, over the years, had they received this benefit over the course of the time that your kids went through that zero-to-six age range, would have received a total of \$36,000 had this program been in place since your first was born.

There's been a suggestion made by several people on the other side that it's "nothing". How would \$36,000 over the years have helped your family? Do you think it's "nothing"?

Ms. Nancy Matychuk: It would have been enormously helpful to us. It would have probably enabled us to do some more fun things in our lives with our kids. We do a lot of fun things, but we would have been able to maybe take a vacation. We would have been able to maybe put our children in some more programs in the community. It would have helped us a lot.

Mr. Mike Lake: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

The time has come to thank the people who have appeared via video conferencing and the people who have been with us since 9 o'clock this morning. Your contributions have been very enriching for committee members, and we thank you for that.

I would also like to thank the House of Commons staff members for their good guidance.

The meeting is adjourned.

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