

Northwest Territories Act
Adjournment Proceedings

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Michael Savage Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NS

Madam Speaker, last week I had an opportunity to ask a question in the House about early learning and child care. We have talked about that a number of times in the House.

What made that such an important question was that at that very time the government's human resources department had a lawyer in a tribunal citing evidence that cast disrepute upon the extended parental leave that was brought in by the Liberal government of 2000. It was cited as evidence.

My questions for the **Minister of Human Resources** were: Was that the position of the government now? Was that a new part of its tough-on-families agenda?

I did not get an answer to that question. What I and all Canadians did get were insulting comments from the minister who suggested that not just the Liberals but also parents who use child care were not taking the best care of their children. I believe that was particularly insulting to many Canadians.

The issues of early learning and child care go far beyond parental leave. As members in the House will know, a study by UNICEF ranked Canada as tied for last position out of 25 nations on the 10 major benchmarks for early learning and care.

The fact that the government believes learning begins at the age of six and not before is a woeful condemnation of the government's record and is somewhat crazy. In fact, learning probably begins in utero, I would suspect. Certainly, as soon as children are born they begin to learn. Anyone who has children knows that, and we are not doing a very good job in this country. We have wonderful parents and are fortunate to have fabulous people working in early learning and care.

I had the chance to visit Bow Valley College a few weeks ago and meet a class of many new Canadians and others who are studying early learning and child care in preparation for providing this service to Canadians. We have great people in the system. We are just not treating them with enough respect. We are not putting enough money into training and accreditation. We need a national system of early learning and care. We have gone through all of the reasons why it is good for families and society, but on occasion the economic argument gets lost.

I want to inform the House of a 2009 government-funded study conducted by the Centre for Spatial Economics. Economist Robert Fairholm found that investing in child care provided the greatest economic benefit of all sectors of the Canadian economy by being the single biggest job creator. Investing each million dollars in child care would create 39.54 jobs, almost 10 times the number of jobs generated by a million dollars invested in construction spending. In other words, a billion dollar investment would create 40,000 jobs in this country. Every dollar invested in child care would increase the economy's output by approximately \$2.30, making the sector have one of the highest GDP impacts of all the major sectors.

This is not just an issue of educating our children and allowing them to be more socially adjusted. That is part of it. However, this is an economic argument as well.

I want to quote from the National Crime Prevention Council of Canada:

Studies have repeatedly shown that high quality ECE reduces the delinquency rate among disadvantaged children. It also increases their likelihood of completing high school and obtaining employment—which are strong protective factors against criminality.

On any measure we can use, investing in our children and in early learning and care, or investing in the future of Canada, pays off not only socially and for the individual family but also for the country of Canada from an economic as well as a social point of view. That is why it is so important to people.

For the **parliamentary secretary**, is it the position of the Government of Canada to get rid of that one-year parental benefit and go back to six months?

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Madam Speaker, when the **parliamentary secretary** speaks about never instituting a plan, that is factually wrong. In 2004-05 the Liberals negotiated a deal with all of the provinces and territories in this country that allowed for provincial jurisdiction to be respected and for the unique needs of provinces.

I would remind him that an ancestor of the current Conservatives, Mr. Mulroney, campaigned on early learning and child care back in the 1980s. He did not have a chance to deliver on that, but he was a Progressive Conservative and, hence, the difference.

My question for the **parliamentary secretary**, who I work with in committee, is for him to put away the talking points that some apparatchik gave him in the lobby. I ask him to put that stuff away and just look over here and answer one simple question. It not a difficult one, but a very easy question. Can he assure me that it is not the position of the Government of Canada to cancel or change the one-year parental leave, which I think Canadians have come to value hugely across this country, but the very program on which his government was in court citing evidence and casting disrepute about?

Is it the position of the Government of Canada to change that parental benefit? Yes or no? It is a simple question.