

**Speech by Stephen Lewis, former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF
at the Child Care for a Change! Conference
November 14, 2004, Winnipeg**

Thank you for so generous an introduction. Let me say that I'm enormously tickled to be here. I stood for an appreciable period of time at the back of the room during the conversation which took place over the last couple of hours. I left only to go back to my hotel room briefly, to change my tie. I had been wearing a tie which was identical to that of John Godfrey. And even for the sake of sartorial symmetry, I was not prepared to allow even a smidgen of political solidarity with a Liberal cabinet minister, certainly not with Jack Layton in the room. I think I should also say, by way of my craving for legitimacy, that I became a grandfather for a second time three days ago, and I therefore have my fraudulence faintly leavened by that event.

I come back to Winnipeg with a remarkable regularity because I regard the province, of course, as a Mecca, a kind of Promised Land, where I can seek political solace. You can't imagine what a delicious antidote it is for me to be here today, because I've spent the last week, believe it or not, in Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Washington and New Orleans. Precisely, all of the pre-Palaeolithic Neanderthals you can imagine gathered at a variety of speaking events. I may say, on the other hand, that I do love speaking in the United States, because it does refurbish my natural and insipient egocentricity. I am always introduced as "ambassador" when I am in the United States, and although it pains me to have to inform the audience that in Canada, when you have finished your diplomatic tenure, you give up your title and revert to mortal obscurity again. It is worth noting that only in the United States: once an ambassador, always an ambassador, once a senator, always a senator, once a president, always a president... The entire country is sustained by titular self-aggrandizement, and Canadians look upon it with a bemused affection.

I also feel dreadfully discombobulated by that reference to honorary degrees, which I must expunge from the C.V. There are many in this room who know, alas, that I attended four post-secondary institutions of incomparably celebrated higher learning, over an infinite number of years, and managed never but ever to acquire a degree. I have therefore spent my entire adult life shamelessly lusting after honorary degrees to covet through the back door what I was unable to achieve through the front. As a matter of fact, may I say to my colleague Manitobans, now that Lloyd Axworthy is president of the local university, I would appreciate if you could importune him. I can only imagine that the astonishing laps in his judgment is a political vendetta, and I don't appreciate it.

I want to start with a disclaimer, a caveat if I may. I just don't have the kind of expertise (if I ever had it) any longer, in this subject matter and I'm frankly a little intimidated by the range of personal experience and knowledge that courses through this room. I listened carefully over the last couple of hours; I'm not going to pretend to approximate much of the discussion. What I'd like to do is to explore a number of disparate themes, and see if I can pull them together into a symmetrical whole by the time I have reached the finale. And I apologize to you profusely given the number of major speeches and interventions you've heard over the course of the three days, if a good deal of what I say is repetitive. At times, I suppose, I may sound faintly political. That actually worries me because I don't mean this to be a pejorative or ideological exercise. On the other hand, I can't simply abandon the maniacal spasms of the left to which I am normally

addicted. So I will attempt to exert supernatural self-discipline to avoid causing you collective offence. Let me start, if I may, with a number of obvious premises.

Number one: Everybody now understands, I think, and this is an international understanding, it is not merely a Canadian understanding, that early learning and child care fused together is the kind of objective which any civilized society strives for, and that it becomes an indispensable and vital dimension of a child's life, enhancing all of the family characteristics which shore up the child, but profoundly influencing in the most positive imaginable way the opportunities for the child. And our sense of early childhood education and care in the earliest years has, of course, flowed consciously and continuously over the last number of years with the proliferation of studies and thoughtful analyses, and everyone in this room accepts the premise of what early learning and child care can mean.

Number two: The consensus that we now share, I remind you, is rooted internationally. I'm not going to dwell unduly on international themes, but I want to remind you that it is rooted in an international agreement, which undoubtedly Landon Pearson would have referred to, which is the Convention on the Rights of the Child and that goes right back to 1989. The reason that November 20th is International Child's Day is that was the day in 1989 when we had the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And within one year, we had a sufficient number of country ratifications to make the convention a document with the force of international law. Now I brought the Convention with me because it is a little biblical text which I cherish, and I want to remind you of the major clauses under Article 18:

“For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present convention, states parties (that means governments) shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities, and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.”

It goes on:

“Governments shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child care services and facilities for which they are eligible.”

Now, obviously that qualifier of “working parents,” were that convention to have come into place today, would have been made more generic, but the fact of the matter is that within the convention, as far back as 1989, and the whole decade of negotiation which preceded it, there was writ large, a commitment to child care and that commitment suffused, clause after clause, of the convention in a whole variety of ways. And everyone, even then, understood that the amalgam, the integration of education and child care, was what we meant by “a system of child care.”

Number three: The emphasis on early learning and child care continued irresistibly through to the next major gathering of nations at the second World Summit for Children. The first World Summit for Children had been in September of 1990, when the largest-ever gathering of countries of the world had set a number of targets for the year 2000, and given the imprimatur of legitimacy to the Convention on the Rights of a Child. The second summit was intended to

examine how close we had come to those targets. It was delayed because of 9/11 from September 2001 into 2002, but it is fascinating to recognize what the world felt was the important issue for the second summit in 2002.

I was at UNICEF as Director of Programs towards the end of 1999, and before I left, we were discussing the themes for the second summit at that time. And I well remember how we considered all of the protection issues around children which seemed to be so central to their lives. We talked about child soldiers, we talked about child labour, we talked about child sexual exploitation, we talked about disabled children, we talked about street children, and we talked about the whole panoply of vulnerability for groups of children around the world largely unattended to. But when everything was stripped away, the themes on which the summit focused were: #1: early child care and education; #2: basic education, and #3: the integration of the two. And we chose it because everybody understood, all of the countries around the world and the UNICEF secretariat, that we had dreadfully neglected the preschool years in particular, and that we had never given sufficient attention to early childhood care and development, and that it was time to focus the world on those issues. And they became the *sine quo non* of the Second International Children's Summit.

Number four: There is yet another, and I will end with this, international development mechanism which lends credence to everything that you are collectively doing, and I don't want to diminish this because you are going to hear it spoken about more and more often as the next number of years pass. And indeed, before I finish I want to suggest a certain approach you might take which is consistent with millennium development goals. In the year 2000, in what was called the Millennium General Assembly of the United Nations, all of the countries came together and decided that the consequences of globalization had been so adverse, despite the assumption that globalization would usher in a kind of celestial global equity around the world. The consequences of globalization had proved so adverse, globalization had demonstrated itself to be so inadequate in facing poverty, conflict, disease, environment, trade, and debt, that something had to be done to chose a set goals and targets which could animate the international community. And so, at that General Assembly, they decided on the millennium development goals for the year 2015. That is the focused year. And it's so fascinating that more than half of those targets which have been accepted now as the millennium development goals, and which, to my surprise, country after country is beginning to address seriously, more than half of those targets speak to the imperatives and the priorities which this remarkable conference embraces.

For example, the first target of cutting poverty in half: if you look at any of the material, and you know this better than I do, around early learning and child care and what it will mean to the future adolescent and adulthood of those kids, obviously it can lead to the diminution of poverty. The second goal is on the reduction on infant mortality rates: a clear focus, a constant focus on the health and well-being of children, which lies at the heart of what you want to do. Number three was a reduction of maternal mortality rates – the health and well-being of mothers – clearly a central focus of what it is you want to achieve. The fourth goal was to put every single child who is eligible into free and universal primary education. There are 123 million primary school-aged children in this world who are not in school, 60% of them are girls. Obviously the emphasis on basic and early education out of the millennium development goals is utterly consistent with what this conference intends. Number five: it speaks strongly as a goal of gender equality, and

one of the premises on which a universal child care system is based is the quest for the reinforcement of gender equality.

So in five of the eight goals which the world has decided on for the year 2015, endemic to these discussions, is a consistency of your objectives with the world's objectives. And it's absolutely clear that Canada would be fulfilling the obligations to which it has claimed adherence if it introduces a universal child care system across the country.

Now, despite everything, and here's where I'm going to get anxious, but the truth is you never have to ask me back again, so I'm going to speak as honestly and from the heart as I can speak. Despite everything we know, this system of child care we've all embraced and revered for years has not happened, albeit it has been promised scores of times with what appeared to be an apparent sincerity and commitment. In the case of the province of Ontario, where we were ruled for a number of years by a most extraordinary group of antediluvian philistines, they actually (well, I said I would not be pejorative) commissioned studies. Look at the Mustard and McCain report. They actually commissioned studies to show the importance of early childhood education and how it should be integrated with child care and early learning as whole, with the entire system. And the studies were so first-rate, and they evidenced such important information, I can remember that UNICEF invited Fraser Mustard not once but twice down to New York to speak to the assembled senior staff so that they would understand the importance of early childhood care and development on the eve of the second International Summit I referred to.

But in the province of Ontario, despite all of the evidence which the province itself had commissioned, there was an actual depreciation of the importance of early childhood learning and care, rather than an emphasis. It is legitimate, therefore you should forgive me, to be jaded and sceptical and probing. The present initiative, the present promises are enormously exhilarating as promises, I grant you that. But I want to tell you from years of political and other experience: it will not happen. It will not happen unless you do as Judy Rebick and others have importuned you to do. And that is to mobilize your colleagues, and people of sympathy across the country, and engage in the kind of tenacious and indefatigable lobbying over the next couple of months, and then for the years thereafter, which will turn the promises into reality. So if I'm given the title, as I was, "Into the future: Where to from here?" I think we can all agree on certain basic principles:

A: That there should be a national child care system. I was told that Ken Dryden's use of the word 'system' is a very useful description. Therefore, I will use system as well. And as part of that, we don't need funding, however much it may be, to shore up the fragmented and piecemeal nature of child care in Canada now, which the OECD reports, so carefully documented. We need to create something new, all-embracing and formidable, as a system of child care which will win support and applause right across the country.

Number two: The Quebec model would appear to be a perfectly good starting point.

Number C: The QUAD factors which all of you embrace – quality and accessibility and universality and development and accountability – whatever the various indicators are, we all understand that the quad emphasis is what must emerge.

Number four: It would be absolutely superb to put in place a plan legislatively which is comparable to the Canada Health Act. And I'll come back to that in a moment.

We also need Number five, a plan which guarantees access to the disadvantaged and the marginalized, guarantees access to disabled kids, or kids with a variety of difficulties, as well as to First Nations children, and finally, that it's something which we must embrace quickly. It has to happen speedily. There can be no further delays. You have to measure it against the years and years where children who might have benefited from a universal child care plan were denied the benefits because of an almost cosmic capacity to procrastinate and prevaricate, and that has to come to an end.

Now that seems to me to be, by and large, what I heard as I loitered amiably against the wall at the back of the room. How to get there, and to reach that generally agreed future, seems to me to require an intense political exertion and an identification of the objective political circumstances which exist. I am going to suggest a prescription, although I do so with caution. I don't want to be presumptuous because many of you have thought about this a great deal more than have I. But I want to have as a prefatory comment the following: I've never seen an issue so extraordinarily well-documented. The materials are superb, every single aspect of this issue, of this objective, of this remarkable cause, has been analyzed and documented and thought about and written about *ad infinitum*. It's almost supernatural, the amount of contemplative and intellectual and emotional energy that has gone into the formulation of responses.

I picked up this *From Patchwork to Framework: A Child Care Strategy for Canada*. Now I read everything, I want to assure you, with religious fidelity. The organizers of the conference sent me 200, 250 pages worth of material. Martha Friendly sent me 2,250 pages worth of material. And with excruciating sense of penance, I read them all. But I want to tell you, without holding a particular brief for any one aspect, that this *From Patchwork to Framework* seems to me to be an excellent document on which to base the evolution of the policy. For one thing, it's written with an almost transcendental clarity. This does not happen: most such documents are unintelligible to the point of self-immolation. And it also has a highly persuasive logic behind it. And I love the way it set out both the issues and the responses. So I was much taken, I was very much taken with it. And if there are detractors or critics in the house, I apologize for offending you and I'm sure you will beard me afterward and explain to me how I was deluded.

Here are my various thoughts, for what they are worth, and again I beg you to allow the milk of human kindness to flow through your veins and treat me with compassion.

Number one: On a simple reading of what is happening, the dollars are way too low. I'm not going to try to diminish the sense of seizing the moment, but for a purely descriptive and analytic response, a billion dollars a year for five years is not going to build you the kind of system with the requirements and the rapidity which everybody in this room so wishes. If in the province of Quebec, with a \$7 a day subsidy, you're still spending in Quebec \$1.3 billion dollars a year by way of the overall provincial support, and that's in one province of Canada, albeit a relatively populous province. How can you have merely a billion dollars a year for expansion and infrastructure and spaces and support in the rest of the country as a whole? There is a serious discordance there. And it's not to say that Quebec is somehow angelic and perfect, it's simply to say that when one is talking about the dollars, one must encourage the federal government to

think rather more expansively of the dollars they are prepared to commit. They should think as expansively about child care as they're thinking about missile defence. These things come together, and I think make a worthy analogy.

I also agree with Gary Doer's point, which I gather he disgorged from this platform, that one must think sustainably, and five years doesn't give you that sense of sustainability. I am too crotchety and curmudgeonly and begrudging and jaded: I turned 67 rather recently, and I've lost that natural instinct to believe everything I hear, but I would worry a little about the timeline of the five years. And I would think with the negotiations that are taking place that the longer sustainable funding is absolutely necessary. And I beg you, I beg you all: while it is exciting, of course, to have a new language spoken, while it is exciting, of course, to have some billions of dollars apparently on the table and referred in the Throne Speech, and while it is exciting to have as decent a fellow, and bright and interventionist a fellow as John Godfrey on your side, I beg you, don't be intoxicated or hypnotized by what has taken place. People will come to you as if they have been struck by a revelatory moment: "My God! It's 2004! 22 years after the Winnipeg conference in 1982! We're going to confer upon you a child care system in the country!" Ken Dryden strikes me as a perfectly amiable fellow but if I was Ken Dryden, I would dress in ashes and sack cloth and I would humble myself on my hands and knees to beg your collective response at having taken so long to get the policy before you. And I like Ken Dryden. You can only imagine what I would say if I were to try to defame him.

I actually think that there is a tendency to overstate one's appreciation of what has happened. Look at the people in this room, for heaven's sake. You fought the good fight for so long. It's as though these 20, 25, 30 years of struggling to get here are of little consequence now that an announcement has been made. I beg you to measure the tremendous and often difficult amalgam of lobbying and writing and pressure and pursuit that has characterized so many in this country for such a long period of time and that that should be respected and honoured and treasured. Just because from some Olympian height there's a Throne Speech which says \$5 billion year...please see it in context. And the context, if I may be so bold, is that a lot of our social priorities have been dismantled, a lot of our previous commitments made with tremendous affirmation have been jettisoned. Dare I remind you: 1989, the Canadian House of Commons, every single member of the House of Commons of every party, voting for the elimination of child poverty by the year 2000? And when the year 2000 came, we had almost half a million more children, by way of absolute numbers, living below the Stats Can poverty line than we had in 1989. But there was around the commitment of 1989 the same kind of feeling that exists today. Don't let it slip through your fingers without the dogged tenacity that turns these rhetorical affirmations into reality. May I be so bold as to remind you that in the recent budget in Canada, we had a surplus of \$9.1 billion dollars? That surplus all goes to pay down the debt. Let me say, and this isn't some jaundiced personal view, it's an objective view, that there is an intense fascination these days, in country after country, with financial architecture. And there is nowhere near the same embrace of human priorities. It is as though the econometric fascination with the numbers that surround the governing of society somehow take precedence over the social sectors, over the human dimension, over human priorities. Now you appear to have won one of the most important human priorities that can be managed. But it is just the beginning.

Number two: Partly because of the numbers of dollars, the spaces are not overwhelming. To have 250,000 additional spaces by the year 2009, when we require 1,400,000 spaces now, does not bring from me a sense of idyllic submission. The fact of the matter is that if Quebec, again, forgive the analogy, but I think it's appropriate, is going to have 200,000 spaces by the end of 2006, then an additional 250,000 for the country as a whole by 2009 is not something that should lead to intoxicated fervour. The disparity is still rather great, and that speaks to the need of sustainable funding to which others have made reference.

Number three: We really do have to come to grips with this question of commercial child care, and look carefully at the recommendations that flow from the OECD about the value, the inordinate value, of non-profit and public day care in a way that makes such a difference to children. I think it is terribly important that we not establish a two-tier system. Because there is commercial day care, you may, in the process of legislation, want to grandfather it in, or do, as Martha Friendly and others have suggested: in the transformation, transition carefully over time to a system which is based on non-profit and public principles which seem, on balance, to provide a very high-quality response to children, akin to the kinds of discussions I heard here earlier in the roundtable this morning. But if we are going to build a new system rather than reinforcing the patchwork, let the emphasis be on the non-profit and public sectors, and frankly that is not yet clear. It is not clear at all. When I hear the language, I hear amorphous language. When I hear the language, I hear tentative language. When I hear the language, I hear slightly passive language. This is a principle which should be looked at forcefully.

Look, I am not such an ideological, frenetic curmudgeon that I don't understand the value of public-private partnerships. I think that public-private partnerships in the resource sector make eminent sense, and public-private partnerships in the manufacturing sector make eminent sense, and public-private partnerships in the retail-service sector make eminent sense. But not in the public sector, which it is time we came to value and to cherish because it speaks to the human dimension; it speaks to the persona of children in all of their varieties, their entire little personalities. The public centre is what shores that up, that's why it is in health, that is why it is in education. Surely, as we are building a fresh child early learning and child care system, the public sector and non-profit should be given priority. Indeed, given primacy.

I'm desperately trying not to lift myself to rhetorical hyperbole which will discredit what I otherwise wish to say. I want to add to this question of commercial and non-profit and public the very considerable caution which was voiced at one of the microphones this morning by the CUPE delegate about NAFTA. Let there be no illusions about NAFTA. It has not yet been tested in terms of Canada on this particular front. And to engage in a commercial expansion could well invite major conglomerates and international operators into the country. If you do that by way of commercial expansion, then you really invite a challenge under NAFTA which may well compromise the entire system. This is not some arcane and esoteric legalism, this is the way NAFTA reads, and let no one be equivocal about it. And it's another reason why, in every sense, the public and non-profit makes total sense.

Number four: The whole question of user fees. They've got to be as low as is humanly possible. Because there isn't a study anywhere, certainly that I've read over the years, which suggests that user fees are anything other than a deterrent to some groups, almost always the most

impoverished groups. May I be very personal for a moment. As I wandered through the continent of Africa on the job around HIV/AIDS that I am presently doing, two of the most heartbreaking dimensions of the pandemic are that these millions of children who have been orphaned by virtue of losing one or both of their parents, cannot get to school because they haven't got the money to pay for school fees or for books or for uniforms. One of the great and most damning ironies internationally was that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, under something called Structural Adjustment Programs in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, imposed as a condition of loans that the countries should insist on user fees in education and health. Then the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, towards the end of the century, said publicly, "We were wrong. This has a terrible consequence. We made a mistake." But the countries continue to cope with the consequences, and all of these millions of kids cannot go to school, where they have school feeding programs and they might even get one meal a day, because of the imposition of school fees.

The other aspect which is so distressing is all of the young women, and it's particularly and almost always young women, who cannot get treatment in certain countries because they can't afford even the miniscule fees which are imposed for the treatment. But the treatment keeps them alive, and so it turns into a life-and-death struggle, this business of user fees. So I will absolutely admit to you that I am consumed by the concern around this particular argument. I think it is fair to say that user fees inevitably undermine the position of those who can least afford it. And no matter how low they are, they always act as some kind of impediment or obstacle for some. And because there are children in the wings, waiting for this system of universal child care which we want to introduce, they should never be prejudiced by virtue of a user fee. So look at that part of it very carefully, and make certain that it does not consume a significant proportion of the cost, and make certain that there are the subsidies and supports which will not disenfranchise certain families. And make certain indeed that over time, this pox on social equality is eventually removed.

Number five: The debate between the federal government and the provinces is really crucial to this discussion. Clearly, I think we need a legislated national Child Care Act. I saw in his response that John Godfrey was being very, very careful when he was confronted with that request. And he was being very careful because he understands amongst his own cabinet colleagues that that is by no means in place, and that there may simply be a deep yearning to pass out an additional billion dollars in the next budget to be used by the provinces largely how they want to use it, without the rubric, without the umbrella, without the infrastructure, of a national piece of child care legislation which sets out the basic principles to which we want the provinces and territories and municipalities to adhere. It's terribly, terribly important therefore that you make the point as strongly as possible. This can't be some kind of *ad hoc* impulsive intervention, but this has to be orchestrated as part of a thoughtful integrating of child care and education, observing certain principles embodied in the equivalent of the Canada Health Act on the child care front. It makes all the sense in the world.

But you know what it requires? It requires a strong federal government. It requires a federal government which decides that having made the commitment on child care, it's going to take the commitment seriously, and make it real in terms of availability, universality, quality, and accountability right across the country. Now that's a worry at the moment. I want to speak

realpolitik: We just negotiated an extension of federal monies to the provinces over health care, and the federal government embraced what it called asymmetrical federalism. It wasn't merely special privileges for Quebec, it's the way the government was prepared to negotiate special arrangements with individual provinces. I will admit to you, philosophically, I have difficulty with that. I understand completely the rights of the provinces jurisdictionally. I also understand that we are a federal country, and that the federal government has to provide the leadership, the framework and the principles. That is not too much to ask. That remains, I think, very much a part of the kind of work which you wish to do over the next little while.

Number six: The focus that I heard this morning on quality is tremendously exciting, and the prospect to have real quality in every child care setting is enormously thrilling, and frankly, the quality that is integrated with the education system so that early learning and child care dovetails with the entire educational apparatus. That's what makes most sense, and that all of the elements of good quality are embraced in good child care. Our other grandchild has just passed 2½ years old, and so I've watched as our daughter has gone from child care setting to child care setting attempting to find the right environment for Zev, and it's been quite fascinating because, of course, some settings are better than others, and some settings lack things that other have. You know the one thing that almost all the settings lacked was a sense of gender. Almost all the settings lacked a sense of the opportunity inherent in good child care, in introducing to very little boys a certain sense of what gender equality is about, a kind of gender analysis, a feminist analysis of a child care setting. And this is one of the things which you can now offer and insist upon. It's merely one of the ingredients, along with infrastructure and sensitive responses to children, which can be added to the mix, so that one begins to develop a society where gender equality is a centerpiece because it is rooted in the experience of children from the very, very earliest years.

I want to tell you, I simply cannot imagine anything more important. As I travel this world, gender inequality is pulverizing women everywhere. It's not just killing them, it is rendering their lives diminished, and there isn't a society in this world, including Western societies, where gender equality has been achieved or a sufficient approximation has been achieved, to give to all women a sense of their rights and their empowerment and their equality in industrialized countries, let alone in developing countries. I cannot imagine a more exciting prospect than to introduce this, particularly for young boys early in life.

The other part of the quality aspect is what has been raised here a hundred times this morning, and I assume several times over the last few days, and that is the support for the staff – support in terms of their wages and their benefits. You can't continue to sustain a system of exploitation of the workers on whom you utterly rely. These people make a magnificent contribution to the present and future of our children. How do we depreciate their value so uncritically, so lacking in conscience? So the pay they receive, the benefits they receive, the training they receive, the time off they receive: all of these things will give to them the kind of support which will make their contribution indispensable.

And finally, the time frame. I want to suggest that the only thing missing from the *Patchwork to Framework* document is an accelerated time frame. If you want to achieve 1% of gross domestic product going into the support for universal early learning and child care, which I completely

agree with, then you should do it by the year 2015, to make it coincident with the millennium development goals, because the whole world will have that focus. You will be excited to achieve it then because it will seem to synchronize with the international goals, rather than seeking the year 2020, which is now sought. I am, in saying that, accepting the fact that the billion dollars a year will probably be in place for a while initially, even though I profoundly believe that you have got to ratchet up those numbers, and ratchet them up quickly. And then seek your target for just one decade away, where there is universal, accessible, accountable, quality development day care, child care, early learning.

You're all to be saluted in all of this. God, you've laboured so long to get here, don't let it slide away or emerge deformed or undermined in some fashion. Make it as comprehensive as it possibly can be. You've put so much into it. They've talked a lot, the people at this microphone, about the next two months: meeting with the ministers in January, a budget in February. Yes, you've got to back to your communities and mobilize them and bring them on board and build a huge swath of public support. But may I also remind you that this is a minority government? And that minority governments are unusually susceptible to advocacy and lobbying? I sat through a minority government and I was never so responsive to public clamour in my life. And I think that is true of this government as well. So over the next couple of months or more, sit down with your members of parliament in your individual communities. Talk to them, individually and at length, about what it is you want to achieve. Give them the principles. Argue for legislation. Talk to them about the funding. Let them understand the issues at stake. You have a sufficient number here, representative of all the provinces and the territories, to meet with the members of parliament and to make them understand that this is a notable and serious issue. It's going to come up in the House of Common some way. If the government does not provide legislation, undoubtedly the opposition will find a way to introduce it. And even the Bloc seems willing to support legislation if the predictable *quid pro quo* on financing can be made for the province of Quebec, which seems to me to be perfectly in sync with other things that have been done previously in this country.

In other words, all of the ingredients are there. All you have to do is lobby indefatigably to achieve it and take nothing for granted. How dare I say that to people who have taken nothing for granted all of these years? But remember, the politicians who now embrace the principle are embracing a principle for which you've laboured a lifetime, and which should have been embraced a quarter of a century ago. And frankly, when you win the day – and you will win the day – and you leave your homes in the morning, your neighbours will pour out onto the streets in massive and huge perfusion just to clutch at the hem of your garments.

I truly salute you for what you are in the process of achieving, and if you are tenaciously resolute, if you never give them a moments peace, if you keep after them every minute of every day until they say to you, "For God's sake, leave us alone. We'll do it," then you'll have the universal non-profit, public child care system that all of you want. Thank you for having me.