

STRONG FAMILIES ...
MAKE A STRONG COUNTRY

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DEDICATION

To Linda, my wife, my partner
and my inspiration; and to
Aaron, Reagan and Whitney,
our children of whom we are
both very proud.

“Children are made to love. Parents love children because they remember being loved so much by their own parents. Despite all the hard work, taking care of children and seeing them grow up to develop to be fine young people, gives most parents their greatest satisfaction in life. To reflect on children, we see that this is creation, this is our visible immortality.”

Dr. Benjamin Spock

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FOREWARD

As a society, one of our primary goals is to ensure the healthy outcomes of our children. We can all play a part, but parents have the primary responsibility for raising their children. The family unit of mother, father and their biological children has proven over time to be the most effective caring environment for meeting the needs of children. In reality, our society exists and sustains itself because of the family. In that context, family is a fact, not an option.

The latest research on brain development has found that the foundations for rational thinking, problem solving and general reasoning are all established by the age of one. The brain literally takes shape as a result of sensory input, the most important of which is language and contact by an attentive adult. The period of infancy therefore represents the primary window of opportunity to influence the long-term physical, mental and social health of children. For that reason, families should have the flexibility, options and choices necessary to provide the best possible quality of care.

Managing the family home and caring for preschool children is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society. The gravest social injustice of all time has to be the abandonment of the stay-at-home mother. Unpaid work is still work and it deserves to be recognized and compensated for its contribution to our social well-being. Although caring for children is the most important of all jobs, economic and social realities have put enormous pressure on both parents to work outside of the home. Notwithstanding, research has consistently shown that the vast majority of

parents, where both work, would choose to have one of them stay at home to care for their children. Resolving that dilemma for the family may be the wisest investment in children that we could ever make.

Canada has a 50% divorce rate and 75% of common-law relationships breakup within five years. The consequence has been the growth of lone-parent families, over 85% of which are mother-led. They are 4 times more likely to be living in poverty and today, about one in four children do not live at home with their biological parents.

Through social acceptance of family breakdown, we have created a most dangerous environment for children. It is a new fatherless society filling up with children who are so emotionally damaged by their parents behavior, that they may have difficulty making commitments and forming families themselves. The Murphy Brown argument is over, and Dan Quayle has won. There is overwhelming evidence that lone-parent families are far more vulnerable to difficulties and that the real victims of family breakdown are the children.

Providing the vital prenatal and postnatal care for a child is one of the most demanding challenges that parents will face in their lifetime. If our values are to respect that children are our most precious resource, then our first priority must be to provide a nurturing environment within a stable, secure and supportive family. Let there be no doubt that healthy children make strong families and ultimately, a strong country.

Paul Szabo, M.P.

Chapter 1

THE FAMILY

Family Is A Fact, Not An Option

As a school boy, I remember asking a teacher how you decided which surname was used when a couple got married. She sarcastically suggested that I simply look at my own family and figure out the answer myself. That tells you what it was like forty years ago when there was not a question about whose name you took or how you defined a family. The basic unit of mother, father and children was virtually the only configuration that one found in the household. If you were separated, divorced or living together, you were an anomaly in society and would often be looked upon with a jaundiced eye. Yes, times have changed through evolution and revolution but some things prevail. What has not changed are those things that cannot be changed like history and natural law. Every human being has a family that exists for all time. When a man and a woman form a union, they become a couple. When they procreate and have a child, they become a family with unique biological linkages. In that context, family is a fact, not an option.

In the introduction of its publication, “Profiling Canada’s Families”, the Vanier Institute of the Family states: “Family is one of the deepest most abiding of human needs. Few things matter more to most of us more than the well-being of our families. Collectively, families remain the foundation of society whatever the age, whatever the changes with which they must contend.”

If you consider that the 136 page publication lists 182 bibliographic references, one can only imagine how difficult it must have been to pick words which would be sufficiently inclusive and flexible. However the fundamental and unqualified declaration is that "... families remain the foundation of society...". The thesaurus has a generous supply of synonyms for the word foundation including basis, essence, reason, cause, root, grounds, footing, keystone and establishment. In other words, the assertion is that society exists and continues to do so because of the family.

In the absence of any special motivation, the definition of family necessarily includes a child and this is the only definition of family which applies to each and every member of society. For those for whom this definition causes some difficulty, this concept of family is often referred to as the traditional family to suggest that there are options. Although there are a variety of domestic configurations, there can only be one foundation of society and therefore only one family.

There are some very strong feelings against defining family. People in political life are particularly prone to resist definitions which, by their nature, are exclusive. If you have to define who is "in" then someone must be "out". Politicians therefore tend to seek the safety of inclusiveness. It is a matter of so-called political correctness or some might say political expediency. Nevertheless, it's usually the safest posture in situations where facts may yield to impressions. In 1994, another MP rose in the House and defined family as children and their biological parents. Without hesitation, I applauded the statement which is a customary demonstration of concurrence. I noted immediately that I was the only person in the House who applauded. A quick scan of the House also revealed a scattering of stares which to me represented the growing political threat to the family.

The other element of the Vanier statement is that “Family is one of the deepest most abiding of human needs.” Considering that the family is the reason that society exists, this element is somewhat confusing unless it is put in some sort of context. This demonstrates the need to take care in the usage of the term family. Failure to do so opens up a wide range of weak linkages which are often used to rationalize alternative interests. It would appear that the intent of the Vanier statement is to assert that we need families because families have the ability to satisfy many of our fundamental needs. Since most of those needs can also be fulfilled by other domestic relationships or structures, one can argue that if you fulfil those needs, then that structure is a family.

Needs and/or characteristics usually associated with family include among other things a loving, caring and supportive relationship with an economic association and co-habitation. It would be easy to rationalize that virtually any domestic arrangement can demonstrate most of these features. Any two people, regardless of the gender combination could be in a loving, caring and supportive relationship with economic association and co-habitation. Does that make them a family? When a man and woman get married, are they instantly a family? If one were shown a picture of the two persons, the prevalent response would be to say “Nice couple”. Show the same picture with one or more children and the prevalent response would be “Nice family”. These reactions reflect public conventions developed over time and it likely will be a very long time before the public assumes that all co-habiting adults are, or wish to be, labeled as a family. In most religions, the primary purpose of marriage is procreation and that conjugal union is considered to be a family in the making. For a couple to have children is seen as the fulfillment of the family through its contribution to the continued existence of our society.

In addition to satisfying needs, there are also a number of broader questions to consider which relate to biological association of family members. Does a child value knowing or at least knowing information about their biological parents? Does the bonding of a child to the biological parents affect the outcome of the child and their future offspring? Can a biological parent be replaced in all respects? When one considers the need of adopted children to find or to learn more about their biological parents, the relevance of biology becomes more apparent. Whether it be for medical or emotional reasons, there is a compelling need for the knowledge of and accessibility to one's biological parents.

The family is the basic unit of our society and each and every one of us has one. By definition, it includes children and refers to its uniqueness and not to the characteristics of domestic structure or relationship. That uniqueness has no substitute.

The Highest Form Of Flattery

Asserting that family is defined as a mother, father and their biological children, admittedly touches a lot of hot buttons. The definition is exclusive and for many, leaves the impression that everything else is somehow deficient. In today's society, there are a variety of alternative domestic relationships and arrangements. Some are by choice while others are not. For expediency, adjectives are often attached to the word family to reflect an altered state of a family or another domestic arrangement. Take for example a couple who have separated and their biological children. The family continues to exist despite the fact that they do not cohabit.

They are often referred to as a broken family. If a divorced or separated parent finds a new partner, the relationship is often

referred to as a reconstituted family. We also have lone-parent and single-parent families (never married) which are also referred to as broken. One need only consider the parental issues of child custody and access rights to validate the ongoing existence of the family despite the fact that the domestic structure ceased or was never established. Once a family is formed, it continues to exist regardless of changes in domestic arrangements that either of the parents may enter into after the breakup.

The family is the fundamental unit of society and as such, it has been placed on a pedestal. The respect and esteem enjoyed by the family is evidenced by numerous social conventions such as Mothers Day or Fathers Day. Our social benefit programs and income tax system also have discriminated in favour of the family. Formerly the Family Allowance, the non-taxable Child Tax Benefit is one example of this positive discrimination. As such, it is understandable why earning equivalent recognition or associating with the family is so important.

To achieve social recognition as the equivalent of a family presents the opportunity to enjoy the same social benefits. That is why talking about family and family values often meets with defensive reactions. Society does discriminate when it comes to family but has done so in a positive fashion. To advocate for the family does not mean that you are against other forms of domestic or sexual relationships. The difference is the existence of children and the social unit which provides the environment for their development is the family. The term needs no adjective such as “nuclear” or “traditional” to distinguish it from other structures or domestic arrangements. Our society exists and sustains itself because of the family which should be respected and honoured for that fact.

Positive Discrimination

In May of 1996, the House of Commons passed Bill C-33, an Act to Amend the Canadian Human Rights Act, to make sexual orientation a prohibited grounds for discrimination. Supreme Court decisions on cases involving access to accommodation, services, employment or membership in an organization have consistently ruled as if that provision was already in the Charter. However in the Egan case where a homosexual couple sought spousal benefits, the court ruled that it was “permitted discrimination”. That raises an interesting question about the special status of the family and whether it should be protected. I believe it is and I had the opportunity to debate these issues in my speech on C-33 in the House of Commons on April 30, 1996. The following is an extract of my speech on those issues:

HANSARD - HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATES
APRIL 30, 1996 BILL C-33 - AMENDMENT TO THE
CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Policy by its very nature is discriminatory. In Canada, all are equal under the law. Over time, policy changes have created a complex network of exceptions that extend special status to certain groups or individuals. The extension of any significant special status has been a reflection of society's need to ensure its survival and positive development. To give an example, the laws of Canada discriminate in favour of aboriginal people. They discriminate in favour of seniors. They discriminate in favour of children and families. They discriminate in favour of those who do not make as much money as others by our rules. Policy, by its very nature, is discriminatory. This is positive discrimination, reflecting certain circumstances. It is not negative discrimination. That is the crux of the issue.

The traditional family being father, mother and children has been the beneficiary of many policy developments over the years. We discriminate against all others by policies that declare special status for the family, which indeed is part of the preamble of this bill. We further extend to family extra benefits not available to single Canadians or those living in other than a traditional family relationship. Examples of those benefits extended to the family include such things as survivor pension benefits. Immigration rules allow special treatment for family reunification and sponsoring couples. There is a tax credit for a stay at home spouse. There are child tax benefits and a child care expense deduction. There are many examples of how federal laws discriminate in favour of the family or, as others would say, how we discriminate against others on the basis of some characteristic.

The question of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation continues to be debated. However, in the light of the foregoing, the question may be very fundamental. Do we want to continue to discriminate in favour of the family? That is the question. Once answered, the actions to be taken will come into focus.

If society continues to hold the family in high esteem and reaffirms its special status, we will choose to continue to discriminate in favour of the family. That also means that we cannot amend the human rights act to make sexual orientation a prohibited ground for discrimination. To do so would deny the family its special status by providing a legal basis for others to seek and obtain the same special status and benefits extended to the traditional family. If, on the other hand, society no longer supports the special status for the family and no longer wishes to discriminate in favour of the family, there are two options to address the change in our societal value. One option would be to eliminate all discriminatory

benefits extended to the family. This approach effectively would seek to put all Canadians on the same footing, regardless of what type of relationship, if any, one might have chosen.

We simply would be treated under all the laws of Canada as individuals without dependents. Various laws would have to be changed and nothing would be relevant beyond the individual and their individual rights. The definition of the family would cease to have relevance and many Canadians would cease to receive discriminatory benefits. The impact on people and the finances of the country are obvious.

The second option would be to amend the human rights act to make sexual orientation a prohibited ground for discrimination. This would provide, I believe, the legal basis for challenges to all the laws of Canada, particularly as they relate to the special status of the family and the special benefits extended to them and denied to others. The Supreme Court decision in the Egan case referred to the concept as "permitted discrimination" but the human rights amendment would solve that interpretation.

It is also likely that other Canadians who do not share the special status of the family will also make challenges to our laws to seek the same level and value of benefits. Ultimately, all Canadians will be eligible for all benefits now enjoyed by the family and anyone else. We would, in fact, be equal under the law and all would receive equivalent benefits extended by any and all government policies. To do otherwise would discriminate against someone. Again, the impact on people and finances would be clear. (End of extract)

Chapter 2

FAMILY VALUES

Family Values That Value Families

Many attempts have been made to define Canada's culture without much success. Our cultural mix and heritage are so diverse and so complex that it is difficult to define in cultural terms and still be sufficiently inclusive. We therefore often look for a characterization in social terms which transcends cultural diversity but which still captures the values of our nation and our people. Prime Minister Chretien often closes his speeches with a concise perspective of Canada describing it as "... a proud, generous, prosperous, tolerant and inclusive nation; the best country in the world." In these words, he has reflected the essence of Canada by embracing the collective social values of its people. In much the same way, it is more difficult to define family values than it is to articulate the kinds of attributes that collectively characterize its' meaning.

The establishment of family values actually starts before a child is born. Parents and parents to be, also have important responsibilities to care for themselves and each other. If the well-being of a parent is impaired, it will more than likely also affect the well-being of the children. If the family value is to avoid risk to the child's health, that means that appropriate prenatal care will be sought and the mother will take due care of her health including not smoking, drinking or taking any unnecessary drugs during pregnancy. For the period during which the children are dependent, the parents

also have to establish a family value with regard to the promotion of the physical, mental and social health of their offspring. During infancy, that dependency is total and the quality of care is critical to the likelihood of positive outcomes of the children. The degree to which this value is held is one of the most important decisions that parents will make since it clearly involves sacrifice and a commitment to put the interests of the children first.

Family values are most often associated with the post infancy period in terms of the principles guiding the parents. For example, a parent should make it their responsibility to be aware and sensitive of the other family members; their needs and wants; their successes and failures; their feelings and emotions. Our family members need help with decisions and support in a variety of situations. They need love, reassurance, encouragement, discipline, attention and workable communications amongst each other.

With regard to children, parents should not have favourites but rather treat the children as equals where equal does not necessarily mean the same. Parents have to be honest with their children and let them know when they are wrong and accept them for who they are rather than trying to force the children into the mould of a parent. We should always try to understand the child's point of view, recognize that change is okay and insulate the children from the stresses of adulthood. Parents should not impose their values or norms on the children but rather should provide moral benchmarks and teach them right from wrong. We know that life is tough and can overwhelm you unless you have a good attitude, realistic expectations and are able to cope when things do not go your way. These are the kinds of areas in which families must establish values and the extent to which they will be applied.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Talk of family values almost always brings up the subjects of “the good old days” and “when I was kid”. Often the reaction is that “things are different now”. For me, it depends on how you envision family values. The term may be difficult to define but it is easy to see it being reflected. For example, hugging a child is one of the most effective ways to communicate love, security and caring. The hug is not the value but the motivation and the sincerity reflect the value. Time does not change the need for or the value of a hug. Similarly, a family value is not the action of having a family meal together but rather the communication, attention and caring that are given during that gathering. Fast pace life may be making it more difficult to have a regular family meal together but it does not mean that there are no opportunities to communicate and give attention. If there is no time, the reality is that the parents have put their careers and personal interests ahead of those of the children. In other words the family value has been compromised if not abandoned.

The “good old days” is also often linked to vintage television which has a history of shows depicting family situations. Early shows like “Ozzie and Harriet”, “Leave It To Beaver” and “Father Knows Best” are often ridiculed today because they were corny and did not reflect alternative domestic relationships. Since that time new shows have depicted virtually every conceivable situation including extreme dysfunction in shows like “Married With Children” and “The Simpsons”. Regardless of the vintage, each of the shows reflects values. Whether they be positive or negative values, they provide a context in which to assess the difference. In addition, the alternative domestic situations inevitably reveal the differences in problems, issues and choices which others face. As Martha Stewart would say: “It’s a good thing”.

US First Lady, Hillary Clinton, sees family values from a different angle. In her book, “It Takes a Village”, she writes: “The longing we feel for “the way things used to be”, obscures not only the reality of earlier times but the larger settings in which the family finds itself today, as it struggles with the effects of broken homes, discrimination, economic downturns, urbanization, consumerism and technology.” It is an interesting argument to suggest that social evolution in recent years has been more influential on families than it was in the past. Presumably her argument also means that we can be less responsible for social outcomes. The reference to broken homes presents a chicken and egg dilemma. Broken homes actually reflect a lack of family values and not a reason for their erosion. I assume that the point was that the prevalence of family breakdown of others, poses a negative risk factor to other families because of the apparent growth in the social acceptability of divorce and separation.

Mrs. Clinton also writes: “Whenever someone bemoans the loss of family values, I think about the changes that began when I was a child in the 1950’s, which dramatically affect the way we live, much as the automobile shaped the lives of an earlier generation.” She goes on to talk about how television, fast-food restaurants, highways and telecommunications have taken away from family time. I assume that she is inferring that families have less time together to practice and apply family values because of technology and development of our society. It would appear, however, that the value involved is giving our children the time and attention they need for healthy development.

To suggest that our societal development has stolen that opportunity is a weak argument. Firstly, infants and toddlers do not control the family agenda. They are totally dependent and what parental time is spent is at the discretion of the

parents. Parental time necessarily reduces as the child achieves some level of independence, but presumably by this time the influence of family values has been well established in the children. Secondly, the suggestion that technological evolution causes reduced parental time does not account for the fact that throughout history, society has constantly changed and evolved. Time may change but real family values are lasting unless we choose to change or abandon it. Parents are in control of, and responsible for, the setting priorities for their young children. This is vital during the formative years and realizing that fact is key to raising healthy children.

DIFFERENT WORDS, SAME MESSAGE

In the last US Presidential election, Elizabeth Dole and Hillary Clinton joined in the rhetoric and spoke out on behalf of children. Both made it clear that children were a priority, but the differences in the words implied a difference in position when in fact there was not. Hillary Clinton called on a large team of experts to help her publish a book called “It Takes a Village” which is an old African saying. Mrs. Clinton’s message was that children are influenced by their total environment and wholesome experience external to the family is important because parents cannot do it all. On the other hand Elizabeth Dole’s message was that the family is primarily responsible for raising the children. On its face the battle lines are drawn. However, a closer look at what was said, and in what context, really adjusts the contrast button.

Elizabeth Dole did not write a book that can be quoted but the gist of her speech to the nation was that families have the primary responsibility for raising children; to feed, to clothe, to love and to teach them. These are the basic human needs which start at birth and in her view, the better these

fundamentals were met, the healthier our children would be. Her concern was that there was a growing problem in America where parents were not adequately meeting the needs of their children leading to a growing dependency on government and social agencies. The problem is that by the time third parties get involved, opportunities have been missed and some damage to child's development may already have occurred.

Parents have important responsibilities from the moment they decide to have children and most of those responsibilities remain for as long as the child is a dependent. The quality of the outcome of a child depends primarily on how well the parents have discharged their responsibilities and it is a high risk gamble if parents think they can rely on governments and social agencies to raise their children. It is naïve to think that somehow government and our social community will pick up the responsibility for raising our children if we fail to do so. They will however provide various and sundry opportunities to step in and deal with a problem after it occurs. If the parent does not hug a child, then who? In today's society, third parties such as teachers and caregivers cannot even look at a child cross-eyed without risking being sued. Therefore how is it that the so-called village can have the meaningful closeness and contact essential to a caregiving relationship? This may not be much of a problem in an African village but its quite a different matter in the ultra-litigious USA.

Mrs. Clinton wrote a wide-ranging and politically correct book that clearly attempted to be inclusive and understanding to absolutely everyone. No one was really responsible for anything but everyone was responsible for dealing with problems in the making or after they occurred. In her book, she invokes the churches, schools, libraries and even the Boy Scouts as having a role to play in raising children. Obviously

these are social organizations which can provide exposure to new and different things and presumably influence the knowledge, spirituality and social skills of a person. However exposure to these influences is much later in a child's life. The life of an infant and toddler is centred among the family and the family home and it is this environment which provides the basic care and nurturing which influences the major part of childhood development.

Philosophically, the approach of by-passing responsibility for one's actions is similar to the so-called harm reduction approach to illicit drugs. Some argue that no matter what you do, people will use drugs. We know that users are likely to hurt their health, to get in trouble with the law, to die from bad drugs or to get into problems with drug pushers. In turn, pushers will use the profits to finance criminal activity. The harm reduction approach is to acknowledge that drug use will continue and that government should decriminalize the use of drugs and ensure that they are safe and affordable. In that way, you eliminate the pushers, protect the health of drug users and reduce crime because users will not be charged if caught nor will they have to commit crimes to finance their habit.

The approach has some detractors however. In the first place, decriminalizing drugs and making them safe and affordable will undoubtedly increase drug use. Secondly, government will have to get into the drug business by regulating the importation, production, distribution and sale of drugs in order to ensure that drugs were safe and affordable. This is a non-starter under any criteria but the approach continues to have strong advocates. The reason being is that what they really want is to just decriminalize drugs and provide help to drug users who need it. The name "harm-reduction" suggests one thing whereas the approach is actually something quite

different. In much the same way, the theme of “It Takes a Village” suggests one point of view, whereas the content of the book presents a more balanced and qualified position particularly in relation to early childhood.

Politically, Hillary Clinton overwhelmed the simple message of Elizabeth Dole. Mrs. Dole was talking about laying a solid “foundation” in early childhood. On the other hand, Mrs. Clinton was talking more about the “building” even though she fully acknowledges that the quality of the building can be no better than the quality of the foundation. There are numerous references in the book which clearly state her view on the family. In the first chapter she writes: “Parents bear the first and primary responsibility for their sons and daughters - to feed them, to sing them to sleep, to teach them to ride a bike, to encourage their talents, to help them develop spiritual lives, to make countless daily decisions to determine whom they have the potential to become.” She also refers to the 1994 Carnegie Corporation Report, “Starting Points”, which details the conditions that are undermining the development of our youngest citizens - infants and toddlers. In the report, child development expert, Dr. David Hamburg, describes the ideal landscape in which to plant a child as “an intact, cohesive nuclear family dependable under stress.”

Looking through the politics and fuzzy communication, both women did have the same message concerning the family and that is: “Parents have the primary responsibility for raising children.”

Chapter 3

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

The Formative Years

Researchers may differ on how particular early life experiences influence a child's development. However no research study has ever disputed the fact that the quality of family care strongly affects how well infants and young children will adapt to the circumstances that will confront them throughout their lives. On the contrary, research consistently shows that constructive physical and mental stimulation during the formative years is critically important to the success of child development.

On April 17, 1997, The New York Times published a story about the latest research findings on brain development. It was reported that the neurological foundations for rational thinking, problem solving and general reasoning appear to be established by age one - long before babies show any signs of knowing an abstraction from a pacifier - according to findings presented at a White House conference on early childhood development.

New studies are showing that spoken language has an astonishing impact on an infant's brain development. In fact, some researchers say the number of words an infant hears each day is the single most important predictor of later intelligence, school success and social competence. There is one catch - the words have to come from an attentive,

engaged human being. As far as anyone can determine, radio and television do not work.

“We now know that neural connections are formed very early in life and that the infant’s brain is literally waiting for experiences to determine how connections are made.” according to Dr. Patricia Kuhl of the University of Washington. She also stated “we didn’t realize until recently how early this process begins. For example, infants have learned the sounds of their native language by the age of six months.”

This relatively new view of infant development, supported by many scientists, has obvious social and political implications. It suggests that infants and babies need only a loving, but talkative and articulate caretaker, and that a more verbal family will increase an infant’s chances for success. It challenges some deeply held beliefs - that infants will thrive intellectually if they are simply given lots of love and that efforts to purposely influence the cognitive development are harmful.

“If the period from birth to three years is crucial, parents may assume a more critical role in a child’s intellectual development than teachers which is sure to provoke new debates about parental responsibility.” said Dr. Irving Lazar from Vanderbilt University.

Before birth, it appears that genes predominantly direct how the brain establishes basic wiring patterns. Neurons grow and travel into distinct neighbourhoods, waiting for further instructions. After birth, it appears that environmental factors predominate. The inflowing stream of sights, sounds, noises, smells, touches - and most importantly language and eye contact - literally makes the brain take shape.

Being parents is not easy. If family life is chaotic, or stimulation is lacking, or caregivers are constantly changing, it is very likely that the child's ability to perform the essential tasks of early childhood will be impaired. As families, we have the opportunity to invest in the future of our children by ensuring that the quality of parenting in the early years helps them to attain a good start on their cognitive and emotional development. The formative years represent the period during which we can achieve the highest return on our personal investment in our children.

These same themes have been articulated for some time by Dr. Fraser Mustard, President for the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. He appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health in October, 1994 and presented the findings of recent comprehensive research that had been done concerning the factors affecting the healthy outcomes of children.

In his view, the most vulnerable sector of our population was children and his study of the research shows very clear links between what occurred during the early years of life and the adult outcomes of our children. He also presented some compelling evidence that the outcomes were not a question of being poor or rich but rather of other factors related to the quality of care.

He felt that some of the most progressive research in recent time came from the Carnegie Corporation in a document called "Starting Points". The study concluded that brain development before age one is more rapid and extensive than previously realized. That was a very critical factor for Dr. Mustard. In fact he said that "if you're thinking health measures, then think "in utero" because its going on there as much as at the time of birth." He also pointed out that the

social environment of the child has significant and long-lasting influences. You can actually have loss of neuro-function for which it is almost impossible to intervene later on and somehow fix things.

Research indicates that critical development outcomes are rooted in early experiences and influences. Good physical health, and the ability to learn, to cope with stress, to relate well with others, and to have a positive outlook are known to have roots in the earliest experiences in life. Where, how and with whom children spend their time in their early years has a major impact on their healthy development.

Skills such as language acquisition, social competence, the ability to think critically, and the capacity to learn all develop early in life. By the time children are four years old, they have already mastered complex language skills. Number skills and problem-solving abilities are considered an extension of children's early play experiences and reading, writing and spelling are directly linked to early language development and early experiences with stories.

In infancy and early childhood, children need to establish a secure attachment to a nurturing adult. This influences how people relate to others and interpret the world around them. They also need positive sensory stimulation, the absence of which can result in lifelong developmental problems. Finally, children need positive social interaction as their thinking and language competencies develop. It is therefore clear that safe, stimulating, quality care for infants and preschool children is a key factor in brain development. The first three years of life represents 20% of our childhood but accounts for about 80% of our lifetime brain development. That is why so many researchers have concluded that those formative years are so important to the long-term outcomes of children.

Hillary Clinton also included a generous section of her book on the same subject which she wrote in plain language “in the hope of reaching people whose attitudes toward the treatment of children might benefit from it.” Here are a few extracts:

“At birth, an infant’s brain is far from fully formed. In the days and weeks that follow, vital connections begin to form among the brain cells. These connections, called synapses, create the brain’s physical “maps” (the pathways along which learning will take place, allowing the brain to perform increasingly complicated tasks).”

“The first three years of life are crucial in establishing the brain cell connections. But they do not form in a vacuum. Babies need food for their brains as well as their bodies, not only good physical nourishment but loving, responsive caregiving from their parents and the other adults who tend to them. They need to see light and movement, to hear voices, and, above all, to be touched and held.”

“If we conceive of the brain as the most powerful and sophisticated computer imaginable, the child’s surroundings act like a keyboard, inputting experience. The computer comes with so much memory capacity that for the first three years it could possibly store more information than an army of human beings could possibly input. By the end of three or four years, however, the pace of learning slows. The computer will continue to accept new information, but at a decreasing rate. The process continues to slow as we mature, and as we age our brain cells and synapses begin to wither away.”

“What sets the brain apart from any computer in existence, however, is its fragile and ongoing relationship to the world around it. The brain is an organ, not a machine, and its

“hardware” is still being wired at birth, and for a long time afterward. With proper stimulation, brain synapses will form at a rapid pace, reaching adult levels by the age of two and far surpassing them in the next several years. The quality of nutrition, caregiving and stimulation the child receives, determines not only the number of these synapses but also how they are “wired” for both cognitive and emotional intelligence. Synapses that are not used are destroyed.”

Researchers have concluded that the incredible pace of learning in the early years will never be attained again in later years. If brain development is slow at the beginning, playing catch-up is vastly more difficult and costly, in terms of personal sacrifice and social resources, than getting the child’s brain off to a good start in the first place.

“As with cognitive intelligence, the development of emotional intelligence appears to hinge on the interplay between biology and early experience. Early experience - especially how infants are held, touched, fed, spoken to and gazed at - seem to be key to laying down the brain’s mechanisms that will govern feelings and behavior. Some experts speculate that the brains of emotional illiterates are hard wired early on by stressful experiences that inhibit these mechanisms and leave people prey to emotional hijacking ever after.”

According to Dr. Geraldine Dawson of the University of Washington, the prime period for emotional development occurs between eight and eighteen months of age when babies are forming their first strong attachments. As with cognitive development, the window of change extends to adolescence although it narrows over time. But children who have stockpiled painful experiences, through abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence, may have difficulty enlisting the

rational brain to override the pressure to display destructive and antisocial reactions later in life.

Experts On The Early Years

In September 1995, I moderated a televised panel discussion entitled "Round Table on the Family". The focus was to examine factors that occur during the first three years of life which can affect the likelihood of positive outcomes of children. Included in the panel were Dr. Mark Genuis, psychologist and Executive Director of the National Foundation for Family Research and Education; Dr. Dan Offord, child psychologist and Director of The Centre for Studies of Children; Dr. Susan Bradley, Psychiatrist in Chief at The Hospital for Sick Children; Mrs. Marilyn Knox, former member of the Ontario Premier's Council on the Family; and Dr. Dan Keating, psychologist and Director of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research.

Dr. Keating spoke of research evidence which found that a child's experience during in the first three years of life that had significant consequences to their long term health outcomes. Those consequences included the areas of healthy functioning, ability to cope and adapt to change, confidence level and learning capabilities. In addition, he identified the quality of the care giving environment as the most central factor affecting outcomes. That includes both the physical environment, including the nurturing and stimulation, as well as the social environment in terms of the emotional connectiveness and social interactions. All of these things affect the way the brain develops during the critical period thereby affecting the long term outcome of a child.

Dr. Genuis concurred with the importance of the first three years and introduced the factor of childhood emotional

bonding or attachment to parents and how important that is to the child's development. His research showed that early childhood experiences had a very clear and direct affect on the security of our attachment or bonds to our parents. Research shows a direct relationship between the consistency and security of the attachment and the future health and social development of a child.

Dr. Bradley agreed with Dr. Keating and Dr. Genuis and noted that certain stresses on families make it very hard for many parents to be as emotionally available to their children as would be ideal. She also stated that one of the tasks of parents in the two to three year period is to be able to set limits on children's behavior. That requires a reasonable amount of energy and persistence on the part of parents to do that in a consistent fashion. Over-burdened parents who do not have enough time for their child will frequently be inconsistent and give in more than would be appropriate for the child's growth and development. Children end up suffering as a result of the sorts of things emerging in our society which put stresses on families.

She also referred to the situation where both parents worked. The process of getting meals and doing household chores means that many mothers feel stretched in terms of trying to also be there for the kids. The kids begin to feel that the parents are not available and react by becoming oppositional. The more oppositional they become, the more frustrated the parents become. That process, that often gets initiated in the early years, becomes very difficult to stop as the child becomes more aggressive in their demands for parental attention. If parents cannot hear the message and react in firm consistent fashions, it can have a snowballing effect which can produce unhealthy outcomes such as aggressive behavior and anxious attachments within the family.

Mrs. Knox reaffirmed the same concern about time constraints on caring for children while Dr. Offord introduced a note of caution with regard to being able to accurately predict outcomes. He stated that it is simply not true that we can predict the life course of kids based on taking some measures or some early observations. This supports the notion that there are no absolutes, but based on research we can determine likelihoods and probabilities. Both Dr. Keating and Dr. Offord pointed out that family poverty clearly increases the likelihood of poor outcomes and call on us to be responsible for more than our own children. It was also noted that inconsistency in parenting can also occur in well off families just as easily. To support that point, Dr. Offord noted that poor children only accounted for 15% of children with problems who came to The Centre For Studies of Children. All participants agreed that the problems are complex and that a multiplicity of solutions were essential to ensure that our children have a healthy start on life.

Parliament Advocates For Children

In September 1995, members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health decided to examine strategies that result in positive health outcomes for children. Their report entitled "Towards Well Being - Strategies For Healthy Children" was issued in April, 1997 and presented to Parliament. The members heard from a wide range of witnesses who discussed the incidence of adolescent and adult problems which originated in early childhood and which were preventable. The Committee also received confirmation that families, as the primary caregiver for children, provide a major foundation for their physical, mental and emotional health. As the children mature, there was reinforcement for the view that communities and governments play an active

role in securing a positive future for children by building on healthy early childhood development.

In regard to promoting strong families, the Committee heard evidence from a recent Statistics Canada report on children that reinforces the view that strong caring families have a greater probability of producing healthy, resourceful children. These children are less likely to become reliant on social programs, the health care system and correctional services. As part of its focus on preventative approaches aimed at children, the Committee saw a role for the Government of Canada in promoting policies and programs to support parents and strengthen families. That recommendation was made to the Minister of Health.

In regard to the determinants of child health, with particular reference to individual capacity and coping skills, witnesses testified that the quality of care that a child receives during the first three years of life is the most important single factor in the child's early development apart from genetics. The testimony described how there were certain windows of opportunity: a window for intellectual development, a window for emotional control and a window for the potential for attachment. Attachment is the source of capacity for trusting and forming satisfying ongoing relationships. It is the basis for all socialization and affects the capacity to be sensitive to the feelings of others and the willingness to change one's behavior to please others. Those windows of opportunity appear to close by the third year of life.

Dr. Mark Genuis of the National Foundation for Family Research and Education also reported on the findings of a meta-analysis. The study concluded that regular non-parental care, prior to the age of 5, of more than 20 hours per week,

has an unmistakable and negative effect on social, emotional and behavioral development and bonding.

The issue of child poverty, which normally means family poverty, was also raised frequently by witnesses. International comparisons with other industrialized countries show that Canada fell behind the others, only ranking better than the United States in terms of child poverty rates. While the committee accepted that poverty is an exacerbating factor affecting child outcomes, it was acknowledged that poor people can raise healthy children and well-off people can raise unhealthy children. However, we also know that where there is a child in poverty, there is parental deprivation, both emotional as well as physical, that has an adverse effect on their children. A strong recommendation has been made to the government to continue to address child poverty as a high priority.

With regard to family breakdown, the Committee learned that living with only one parent means that a child is about four times more likely than those with two parents to live in poverty, a factor with a direct relationship to the quality of their health. A Statistics Canada study showed that, of children up to 11 years of age who live in poverty, 43% live with only one parent although lone-parent families only comprise about 16% of this group. Other parental factors raised with the Committee included illiteracy, unemployment, substance abuse, violence, and teenage pregnancy all which were viewed to be strongly linked to the negative outcomes of children.

The committee also felt that the efforts to identify and intervene with high risk families must be initiated at the prenatal stage and continued during the children's development stages. They also felt that the task must extend

beyond the health area and involve cooperation and coordination across all sectors. The Committee therefore recommended that the Minister of Health and the Minister of Human Resources Development co-operate in developing programs to support and promote early intervention for children in families at risk including prenatal nutrition, home visiting, peer support, respite services and parenting education.

Witnesses also advised the committee that the quality of parental care is crucial to the development of coping skills and to the normal psyche during the child's early years of life. To support parents in shaping healthy children, suggestions included the importance of breast feeding; providing a secure consistent child-adult bonding; and providing good nutrition and a stimulating environment.

Many witnesses raised the issue of parental decisions about the daily care of their children and the importance of those decisions. Most supported a range of options but in particular those that gave parents real choices. Some reported that in families with preschool children where both parents worked, the majority indicated, that if they could, they would choose to have one parent provide direct parental care in the home. Others asserted that where both of the parents worked, after child care costs, taxes and the cost of employment, the net take home pay is greatly reduced and often not worth the sacrifices being made. In addition, it was pointed out that the child care expense deduction was only available to the lower income earning spouse therefore discriminating against lower income families.

The committee felt that the Government of Canada should work with other levels of government to promote a greater range of options for those seeking care for the children. They

recommended that the Minister of Health co-ordinate the publication of a guidebook for nationwide distribution outlining the factors affecting the probabilities of positive outcomes of children including a focus on the role of breast feeding, emotional bonding, prenatal and postnatal nutrition, physical and mental stimulation and parental attitudes. The committee also recommended that the Minister of Finance examine ways to provide equivalent tax benefits to families who choose to provide care in the home compared to those who find outside caregivers for their children.

In regard to the area of promoting strong families, much concern was expressed about the crisis of the breakdown of the family and the problems of divorce. The Committee felt it was important that the government look at policies and programs to ensure that they support parents and strengthen families and to ensure that those programs and policies do not discriminate against families who stay together as opposed to those who live apart. The Committee also recommended to the Minister of Justice consider ways to educate the Canadian public about the positive effects on the healthy development of children associated with strong and committed families including measures like counselling, mandatory or otherwise, prior to any legal consideration of separation or divorce.

These are but a few of the observations and recommendations of the Health Committee which clearly demonstrate the need to invest in our children and in the family.

The National Forum On Health

The National Forum on Health, a health policy advisory and consultation body chaired by the Prime Minister, was launched in 1994 to provide guidance to improving health care. The forum conducted two years of research and

consultation on how to improve both the health care system and the overall health of Canadians. Their report was issued to the Prime Minister in early 1997.

As a result of their research, the Forum found, among other things, that focussing on raising healthy children, with particular attention paid to the zero to six years of age group, can prevent many expensive health and social problems. They also found that social accommodations of family life have a significant impact on children and their health later in life. In particular, the zero to six year period in the life of the child was found be critical for brain development. As a consequence, the forum included a major section in the report called “Investing in Children”.

The Forum reported that there was an urgent need to invest in children. They stated that failure to invest in the early years of life increases the remedial cost to the health, education, social services and justice systems. The problems are compounded when separation or divorce occurs. Separation or divorce from a spouse or partner should not mean separation from children. They felt that too many parents, mainly men, abandon their children emotionally and financially when they separate from the other parent.

The Forum noted that children who are poor have more sickness, chronic illness, higher rates of injuries, more severe injuries, more emotional and behavioral problems and higher rates of death. The problems of inequality and child poverty in our society are not new. The fact that they still exist, suggests that we have resisted taking collective responsibility for the health of Canadian children. They state that while they firmly believe that the primary responsibility for children lies with parents, it is our collective interest to ensure the well-being of the children.

To address their findings, the Forum identified a number of elements which could form a part of a comprehensive strategy to help improve the health of children in Canada. In terms of financial assistance, it was recommended that the federal child tax benefit and provincial welfare payments be combined into a single benefit particularly for the benefit of lower and moderate income families. The Forum went on to state that at the heart of pro-child and pro-family policies should be the recognition of social and familial responsibilities for the well-being of children. They point out that Canada is the only Western country that does not take into account the cost of raising children when determining how much tax families with children should pay compared to those without children. The Forum therefore concluded that families are penalized by the income tax system for having children and they recommended that the tax system be reformed in a manner which reduces the net tax burden of all families with children.

The Forum also found that there was strong evidence that quality preschool enrichment can support the healthy development of children. They recommended a comprehensive approach for children zero to six years of age. For those very young, ages 2 to 18 months, especially those exposed to higher risk, they recommended home visiting programs which have proven to prevent many problems and which provide opportunities for advice, teaching and early problem solving. They believe that those programs should be the preferred way of intervening. In addition, access to quality child care for those who can pay must be made easier and more reliable. Finally, they believe that there should be more family-friendly policies in schools and work places which would be sensitive to family and caregiver needs such as family leaves, unpaid leaves, flexible hours, work sharing, child care and elder care.

Probabilities And Likelihood

Doing all the right things does not necessarily mean that things will turn out the way you expected and the converse is also true. In that sense, there are very few truisms, absolutes or guarantees in life. Things happen despite our best efforts and that is why it is important not to make rash generalizations about anything. In reality, the best we can do is assess the probabilities or likelihoods of certain outcomes under the circumstances.

The classic example is myth about child poverty. How many times have we heard people say that poverty is the major cause of poor outcomes of children? Does it mean that poor people cannot raise healthy, well-adjusted children? Not at all. Most of us know great kids who come from poor families and we also know of troubled kids who come from well-off families. It does not take money to love a child, to hug them, to sing to them, to read to them, to teach them values and social skills or to play with them. This is all part of parental bonding which is vital to the successful early development of a child. Poverty, although not a cause of poor outcomes, is however an exacerbating factor. For example, physical health may be more at risk for the poor because of nutritional deficiencies.

The same can be said of lone-parent families. Great kids can come from homes where there is only one parent. There may be added pressures or risk elements but the outcomes of children can be good or bad or anything in between. The point is that there are no absolutes but rather risk factors which affect the probability or likelihood of healthy outcomes. Like any gamble, we cannot ignore the probabilities and if you had to bet on it, two parents in the

home are more likely to raise healthy children than one parent alone.

Although the family, consisting of a mother, father and their biological children, has proven to be the most durable and effective means of meeting the children's needs over time, it is not to say that other forms cannot work. However, most adults consciously choose to become mothers and fathers and therefore we owe a higher degree of love and respect to the children that we bring into this world.

Prevention Versus Cure

In 1994, I became a member of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health and one of the first items of business was to receive an assessment of our health system from Health Canada officials. One of the most interesting points made was that about 75% of healthcare spending in Canada was for curative or remedial treatment whereas only 25% was directed at preventative measures to promote good health.

Health Canada officials also stated that about 80% of the healthcare costs in our lifetime will be incurred in the last year of our lives. When you consider the issue of an aging society, it is clear that the demands on and costs of our healthcare system will increase dramatically unless changes are made. Health Canada agreed that the current trend was simply not sustainable and that a shift to preventative strategies promoting positive lifestyle choices was imperative. That shift has already become more apparent with the more aggressive position Health Canada has taken on the tobacco issue. Preventative measures are less costly for the system to deliver and although the payback is generally longer term, the savings over a lifetime are much more substantial.

The same principle can be applied to the outcomes of children. Research has shown consistently that children who have received a higher quality of parental care are less likely to have health, social and criminal justice problems in their lives. Too often our approaches have been to address problems after the fact. For example, youth crime continues to be a top concern for many Canadians and the calls to get tough and to repeal the Young Offenders Act, are very strong. However, the Department of Justice reports that 70% of young offenders come from broken families. This is a troublesome statistic which cannot be ignored. There is a general reluctance to get involved in family issues but when the consequences impact all Canadians, it is hard to argue that there is nothing that can be done.

In May 1997, the College of Family physicians of Canada issued its report entitled "Our Strength for Tomorrow: Valuing our Children" which paints a worrisome picture of the state of child health in Canada. In their press release, they stated that the welfare of our children is one of the most critical health issues in Canada and that although physicians cannot address these problems alone, they are committed to be a significant part of the solution. Some of the key findings include the following:

- More children die every year from preventable injuries than all other causes combined;
- The leading causes of childhood injury or motor vehicle, bicycle and household accidents, drowning and fires;
- Many Canadian children suffered terrible indignities resulting from family violence, abuse and neglect;
- Low birth weight accounts for about three quarters of deaths under 28 days of age in Canada;

- Mothers living in poverty are higher risk of bearing babies;
- Each low birth weight infant, in just the first two years of life, requires health care services costing an average of \$200,000;
- 7.2% of Canadians younger than 19 suffer some form of disability and this rate could be lowered if good preconception and prenatal care was widely available to women; and
- Babies fed formula rather than breast milk are 10 times more likely to be admitted to hospital, yet 90 percent of hospitals with obstetrical services in Canada have exclusive contracts with formula companies.

It should be noted that medical studies have consistently found greater instances of illness among artificially fed babies and that those impacts appear to be life-long. When you consider these facts, it is clear that there is much we can do to strengthen our children and families.

Chapter 4

UNTIL DEATH US DO PART

Love And Marriage

“How do I love thee, let me count the ways.” There are endless demonstrations of one’s love for another but the foundation of love is more attitude and degree of commitment. Real love is unqualified, unconditional and places the interest of your partner ahead of your own. It calls for sacrifice, understanding and patience as well as generous measure of openness and flexibility. Relationships also have problems sooner or later and therefore an ability and willingness to forgive are also essential. Love is also dynamic and in constant renewal and that means for a lasting and loving relationship, you have to work at it every day.

When a couple gets married, their commitment to each other is reflected in their vows. They vow to love and to honour, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, until death us do part. The vows taken represent the most important contract that two people will ever enter into, in their lives. I have often heard some suggests that “it's only a piece of paper”. That kind of attitude speaks volumes about the absence of values. Married couples have long-term plans and goals which will affect the rest of their lives. As the marriage matures, the couple builds their relationship and they get to know each other better than anyone else could ever know. The relationship is the deepest relationship they have ever experienced in their lives and that

is why the consequences of a breakup of a marriage is so devastating to one or both of the partners.

When the couple has children and forms their family, the dimensions of their lives increase dramatically. They now have the responsibility for another human being who will be totally dependent upon them for years to come. In the early years, those responsibilities will be monotonous at times and will undoubtedly interfere with the pattern of life that was previously enjoyed. That is why the strength of the relationship and the preparedness of the parents to take on those responsibilities is so important. The reasons for having a child and the rewards that it brings to the couple are many and diverse. One certainty is that if good quality parental care is given to a child, the joy and happiness of having that child far outweigh the sacrifices that inevitably are made. Parents know how difficult it is to raise children with both the mother and father. Needless to say, the challenge is more severe when there is only one parent doing the job. In 1994, an Angus Reid poll showed that 68% of Canadians said that two parent families was the best model in which to raise children. One can only wonder about the situation of the other 32% and why they think that some other arrangement would be easier and still be in the best interests of children. It could be a defensive reaction.

Lone-Parent Families

Lone-parent families account for a growing proportion of families in Canada, and the overwhelming majority of them are headed by lone mothers. In 1994, one in six children under the age of 12, lived in lone-mother families. Reliable North American research has found that children from lone-mother families are two to three times more likely to have emotional, behavioral, academic or social problems, as

children from two-parent families. Children of single-parent families are more likely to drop out of high school, become pregnant as teenagers, abuse drugs, behave violently and get in trouble with the law. A parents remarriage does not seem to better the odds.

The rise of family breakdown has meant there is a growing number of children are being raised in fatherless homes. The courts have a record of awarding custody to the mother in over 85% of the cases and the consequences are many. Where fathers are absent from the family home, girls are more likely to respond with depression and inhibited behavior whereas boys are more likely to drop out of school and have academic and behavioral problems. These children are also more likely to commit suicide and fall victim to child abuse and neglect. About 75% of children living in fatherless homes will experience poverty before age 11, compared to only 20% of those children raised by two parents.

In 1994, according to a Statistics Canada study, 15% of 4 to 11 year-olds with lone-mothers suffered an emotional disorder, compared with just under 8% of children with two parents. Similarly, there were twice as likely to have academic difficulties: of those aged 6 to 11, 11% had repeated a grade and 6% had current problems at school, compared with 5% and 3%, respectively, of children from two-parent families.

These higher rates of difficulties are often attributed to the fact that many lone-mother families have low incomes. The large majority (71%) of children from lone-mother families live at or below Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-offs (LICO) in 1994; in contrast only 16% of children with two parents lived in low income families. However, research indicates that being a lone-mother places a child at increased

risk of the emotional and behavioral problems, regardless of the family's income. For example, 17% of children in low-income lone-mother families were hyperactive, compared with 10% of children in low-income two-parent families. While the rate was somewhat lower for children in lone-mother families above the LICO (14%), it was still higher than that for children in two-parent families above the cut-offs (10%).

Although both lone-mother status and low income are important risk indicators for childhood problems, analysis suggests that lone motherhood has a stronger influence. The likelihood that a child with a lone mother will have one or more behavior problems was 1.8 times higher than that of a child with two parents, even when controlling for income differences between families. In contrast, the odds of a child, from a low-income family having one or more behavioral problems is only 1.2 times that of a child who is not from low-income family.

The defense of the two-parent family as a norm which satisfies the need for children to be reared in a situation of trust, intimacy, fidelity and security, is regarded by many as a nostalgic yearning for the "good old days". Consider, however, that a high correlation exists between broken homes a whole range of troubles for children. Three out of four teenage suicides occurs in households where one parent is absent and 80% of adolescents in psychiatric hospitals come from broken homes. Studies report that five out of six adolescents caught up in the criminal justice system come from families where a parent, usually the father, is absent. These are but a few examples of the impact that family breakdown can have on the physical, mental and social health of our children. We have tried an experiment in loosening up

the ties that bind and it has failed. It has failed our children; it has failed their parents; and it has failed our society.

Common-Law Relationships

Common-law relationships are becoming more and more prevalent in our society. By the year 2020, it is estimated that the number of common-law relationships will outnumber marriages.

Recently, a program on CBC addressed the issue of common-law relationships. Many people in the audience who spoke suggested that the primary reason for choosing a common-law relationship over marriage was that it was easy to get out of. If one of the parties needs an easy out from the relationship, then they are putting their own interests ahead of their partner.

Divorce occurs in almost 50% of marriages and that is a tragic statistic. What is worse is that common-law relationships breakdown twice as frequently as marriages and last an average of only 5 years. That means that 75% of common-law relationships end within the first five years. In 1996, 14% of couples in Canada were living in a common-law relationship. However, if you look at couples who are under 30 years of age, 42% are living common-law.

During the CBC program, there were number of views expressed. They talked about common-law relationships as being like kicking the tires of a car to check it out. They referred to them as disposable relationships and that everyone was doing it so it must be okay. References were also made to high profile couples such as those in the royal family, media stars and even politicians. There were references to being very individualistic and having a fear of making a commitment. One person even described it as the triumph of

fear over love. In the past, common-law relationships were a prelude to marriage. Now it appears to be an end in itself. From the standpoint of raising children, we know that a secure, consistent bond with parents is critically important. Given that common-law relationships on average do not last as long as marriages, it follows that the probability of healthy outcomes of children from a common-law relationship is surely at higher risk due to the higher prevalence of family breakdown.

Chapter 5

UNPAID WORK IS STILL WORK

The Pendulum Swung Too Far

The gravest social injustice of all time has to be the abandonment of the stay-at-home mother. Managing the family home and caring for our children was and continues to be the most important job in the world. It is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society. Any attempt to do so has been discouraged by those who are advocating for women who choose to work outside of the home. What about those women who choose to put the interests of their children ahead of their own? Who is fighting for their interests? Women's groups more often than not, have been advocating for affordable daycare so that mothers can work outside of the home while someone else provides care to their child.

Choices are important, but the choice to work in the home has not only been ignored, but it has been discouraged for economic reasons. In many cases however, the economic argument is weak at best when you consider how small the net take home pay is in so many cases. Considering the stress on the family and the disruption of the bond of the child with the parent, what economic value makes it worthwhile to leave one's child in the care of another?

The feminist movement has made important advances on behalf of women pursuing careers and seeking equity and fairness within the workplace. Pay equity and employment

equity initiatives by various levels of government have provided an important foundation. However while these battles have been fought, the interests of women who choose to interrupt their career to have a family, have to a great extent been ignored. Research has shown that quality care for a child can be provided by either a man or woman and at times it is a father who provides that care. In the vast majority of cases however, it is the mother who provides the child care and that decision is a family decision to be respected. Because of the prevalence of women being the primary caregiver for children, it is important to recognize their needs and to pursue initiatives which provide the greatest amount of flexibility, choices and options for them.

That is not to say that situations where both parents work cannot produce healthy children but there are increased risks when the security and consistency of the childhood bond are disrupted. Parents intuitively know that, particularly during the formative years, the child's needs are crucial. That is why when polls surveyed parents with pre-school children, where both parents worked, 70% of couples said that if they could, they would choose to have one stay at home with their child. A further indication of parental preferences shows up in the demand for daycare. The Vanier Institute reports that in Canada, the demand for daycare spaces for children up to 3 years of age is about 276,000. However, for children 3 to 5 years of age, the demand more than doubles to 585,000.

Parents know that the formative years are the most important and they also know that direct parental care during this period is of a much better quality than any alternative. It does however require sacrifices to make this investment in our children. If we have better outcomes of children, society as a whole benefits due to lower health, social program and criminal justice costs not to mention the value of the

increased productivity of the child throughout their life. That is why I believe it is so important to provide tax breaks and other social supports to parents who choose to have one spouse stay at home and care for children, especially during the critical first three years of a child's life.

Men, Women And Couples

Discussions about family issues often pit the interests of one spouse against the other. The feminist movement has raised women's issues to the top of the social agenda and who can argue against the basic principle that women should have real equality in all aspects of our society. Not so long ago, the social reality was that fathers went out to work and women took care of the home and raised children. With that as a traditional bias, no wonder women have fought so hard to break down the barriers to their equality. A human being, regardless of gender, can learn and develop the skills and knowledge to do almost anything subject to their own physical and mental capabilities. Because of that fact, women have proven their ability in virtually every field of endeavour. Their current challenge remains to break down the remaining pockets of the so-called "old-boys network" that conspires to frustrate and shut out women because of gender and tradition. Time and social justice are on the side of women and change will continue as a result of the unrelenting advocacy of the collective feminist movement.

Could the pendulum swing too far? Could there be unintended and adverse consequences? The same questions could be asked about any strategy for change. In today's society there is no major men's issues movement, but ever so slowly the signs of discontent are growing. Employment equity initiatives have given substantial advantages to women, visible minorities and the disabled. The protestations

of some men may be faint but they are growing. In over 85% of cases, the courts have awarded custody of children to the mother. The number of situations is so large that non-custodial fathers have begun to organize and are fighting hard for access to their children. These are but two examples of the kind of reactions or consequences that can result from change or affirmative action initiatives.

All of this discussion has to do with men or women and their special interest. In a macro sense, it is easy to argue the issues of men and women, but our social reality includes a much more diverse and complex mix of interests. All men do not share the same set of values with each other and the same can be said of women. In many regards, their interests overlap and compliment one another. For example, spousal abuse is usually referred to as a womens' issue and yet surely there can be no doubt that the vast majority of men are equally outraged by this tragic reality in our society. However, the fact remains that men as a group are often shut out when it comes to advocacy initiatives. Spousal abuse is a societal issue and more progress could surely be made by men and women working together rather than exploiting the issue or painting all men with the same brush. We need to acknowledge that there are many common bonds of association between the genders that define a new set of needs and values which may not be totally compatible with those of men or of women as individuals.

This is particularly the case with couples in a marriage. Too often, relationships are discussed and analyzed in terms of the needs and wants of the individuals and yet the essence of a relationship is to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts. In other words, both partners benefit in ways that were not possible as individuals. Relationships are also partnerships based on love and mutual respect. That means

that the partners work together in the best interest of their partnership and therefore in the best interest of each partner. For others to examine a partnership and belittle it, is arrogant if not ignorant. Couples have goals and plans which take into account their collective situation and shared values. They seek to achieve effective equality but that does mean that each partner is identical in their roles and contributions. In this sense, equality does not mean the same, but rather equitable.

The partners each have skills and abilities, many of which overlap. That means that either partner can fulfil certain roles and do so on an individual or a shared basis depending on the circumstances. There are however certain roles where only one partner can fulfil a role. The most obvious example is the ability of having a child.

The physiological differences between the genders represent the single most compelling factor in defining the roles of the partners where children are involved. There are options to consider and the choices ultimately made are reflective of the partnership values and needs. The decision to have one parent stay at home to provide direct parental care in most cases means the mother. That means that the father becomes the principle income earner which leads to the structure and role which the feminist movement seeks to disassociate itself with. The consequence has been that the role of “stay at home mom” has been unfairly ostracized and ridiculed rather than respected and honoured. Raising children is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society. It is not a womens’ issue but a family issue and the decision of the parents is a joint decision to be respected. Those who seek to apply individual values to a family situation are perpetuating a damaging bias which hurts mothers in many ways. What should be happening is that the feminist movement should embrace mothers and advocate for

ways to recognize that being a mother and raising children is the single most important job in our society.

Both Parents Must Work

The question of whether both parents must work to support their family has been the subject of much discussion in recent media. Depending on your family circumstances, the answer to the question can vary. Some parents have no choice simply because they live below the poverty line and must work to pay for the necessities of life. Others may have chosen lifestyles which necessitates having both spouses working. The real answer has to come from the parents who have made those choices. If you believe that the health of your children is at risk when both parents work, then your choice is determined by your family values. What value do you place on the health of your children?

A recent news report interviewed a young woman who had her own dress shop. She told the reporter that she wanted to start a family but that she just could not give up the business. For her it presented a dilemma that demonstrates that sacrifices and compromises sometimes have to be made. If a couple wants to have children, there inevitably will be sacrifices to be made in terms of the lifestyles and choices they have made for themselves. After all, having a child is not a modest undertaking which can fit neatly into our lives. The question they have to ask is why do they want children and are they prepared to undertake those responsibilities without compromising the healthy development of their child. In the case of the dress shop owner, it may be a case of finding someone capable of carrying on her shop under her direction while she discharges her new responsibilities. Having your business run by someone else will never be as good as you would run it but that's part of the sacrifice.

A recent Statistics Canada survey of 11,000 people released in September, 1997, found that 59% of men and 51% of women agreed that preschool children suffer if both parents are working. A Compas Poll, released on April 7, 1997, found that 92% of respondents felt that preschoolers should be cared for by their parent. The other 8% preferred an institutional daycare setting. What it shows is that most parents intuitively know that direct parental care is the best possible care for their child. That intuition is also supported by a variety of research which confirms that the quality of care particularly during the formative years is a major determinant of the health outcomes of children.

The economic argument depends on number of factors. If one of the parents, usually the mother, retains the primary responsibility for caring for the child, that means that the job that they seek must be such that they are in control of the time worked. In many cases, that means that the job taken usually is in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 salary range. When you consider the income taxes, the cost of child care and the cost of employment, the net take home pay is often very small. The net benefit from a second income when a family's children are small is approximately \$67 per week for a \$20,000 job and \$105 per week for a \$30,000 job. That in itself creates a dilemma because it becomes very difficult to justify putting your child into institutionalized care or with another person. Living around the child care schedule, making various sacrifices and the stress it causes to the family, may not be worth it.

The 1994 Angus Reid poll found that 70% of parents, with pre-school children, where both were working said that if they could they would choose to have one of them stay home and care for their children. This is one of the reasons why I have been advocating for tax breaks for families who provide direct

parental care so that the dilemma of giving up a low net take home pay does not become a major hurdle in making the decision. The National Forum on Health Report also identified the importance of quality parental care to child health outcomes and also recommended investing in our children through increased financial support including tax breaks for families. The same conclusion has been reached in other jurisdictions as well. In Sweden for example the government is dismantling its subsidized daycare and using the savings to support families who provide care in the home to preschool children.

The issue of daycare is also an important consideration. Many families have other family members or neighbours with whom they feel very comfortable to care for their child. These informal daycare arrangements allow them more flexibility to carry on a career without serious risk to the child provided there is a secure and consistent attachment of the caregiver to the child. However, institutionalized daycare is quite another matter. In Ontario for example the provincial government has set a target salary level at approximately \$18,000 per year. Under those circumstances, it is likely very difficult to be able to attract and keep trained and educated child care givers.

Conspiracy Of Experts

In conducting my research, I looked at the work of a broad range of groups and organizations who specialize in sociology, psychology and family health. I found it particularly frustrating to find that terminology and statistics were being used in ways which were difficult to compare with other work. For example one organization uses the term single parent interchangeably with lone-parent. The confusion as to whether the word single refers to “never

married” or to the fact that they split up with their partner. Some use family to refer to parents with children whereas Statistics Canada defines families as couples, married or unmarried, with or without children. One group studying lone-parent families stated that most children living in poverty come from two parent homes. It is true but lone-parent families represent only 11.3% of all families but account for 42% of children living in poverty. There does not appear to be any standardized definitions or calculations and therefore everyone should take caution before reaching conclusions unless you get all the words, all the numbers, all the definitions and all the assumptions.

It almost appears that there is a conspiracy to make sure that everything is reported in a way which cannot be compared. The only reason I can think of for this is that it helps to employ a lot more people in the industry than is really necessary. They seem to keep busy by giving seminars and lectures to each other as well as coming up with new and creative ways to say the same thing in different ways. This may seem a little unusual but on the other hand, I can recall a conversation with Toronto Mayor, Barbara Hall, concerning the issue of daycare which lead to the same answer. We talked about the importance of strong families and agreed that the low compensation paid to daycare workers was a barrier to providing good quality child care. She surprised me however when she said: “you have to understand that daycare is part of our employment strategy”. It is an interesting perspective when you consider that the issue of daycare relates to the needs of children and yet the object of the programs seems to be as much to provide low paying jobs.

My concern, about the confusion in communications about statistics and trends, is that it feeds the media a tremendous amount of soft information which can be used for virtually

any purpose. For example, a recent Statistics Canada study reported that 60.5% of families relied on two incomes. Both The Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail ran substantial headline stories about how difficult it was for families to cope and meet the needs of their children because in the majority of families both parents had to work. A closer look at the study however revealed some facts that were not reported. Firstly the definition of family included households whether or not they had children and in fact only 13% of the families surveyed actually had children under 6 years of age. Secondly, the percentage of families where both parents worked actually declined from 62.7% in 1989. Thirdly, the income numbers reported excluded investment, pension or other non-employment income.

Under the circumstances, the study did not justify or support the stories that appeared in the newspapers. However they are not accountable for their interpretation of the story to anyone and Statistics Canada does not respond to inaccurate interpretations of its reports mostly because it does not provide all the details to the media when they issue their press releases. In the end result, that means that the readers of the newspapers see the name Statistics Canada and the headlines “Women’s Earnings Keeps Families Afloat” and believe whatever is written despite the fact that the story did not accurately reflect the facts. The media has the objective to sell as many papers or services as it can and a spicy feature or article which touches hot buttons or fuels the flames is what they want. I can remember a reporter telling me once about a writer who went to their editor with a great headline. The editor said “What’s the story?” to which the writer responded “No real story but boy its a great headline.” The editor responds “You’re right. Let’s go with it.” As with most information, the credibility of the source and their motivation needs to be known before you take it as true.

Chapter 6

STRONG MEANS RESPONSIBLE**No Fault Society**

Over the past 25 years, there has been a radical shift in the social and moral values of our society. Doctors used to be revered. Teachers used to be respected. Families were strong and relationships were, for the most part, life long. However, today nobody seems to be at fault for their problems. One of the biggest cop outs seems to be the excuse of “low self esteem”. The term has been used as a synonym for guilt, conscience, feeling bad, being insecure, failing, or just being in the wrong. How can we learn from our mistakes if we do not take responsibility for our actions or inactions? How can others learn from our mistakes if we do not acknowledge that there is a problem?

In a recent tragic case, a 19 year old former street kid was released from a group home with a premature baby. She was known to be a high risk parent and sadly the baby starved to death. How could this happen? As it turns out the mother and the Children’s Aid Society worker were both charged but I cannot help but feel that this tragedy is a wake up call for us all. On July 27, 1997, Sun columnist, Christina Blizzard, wrote an article about the case. The following is an extract which speaks for itself:

“Twenty years ago a street kid-turned-mom with a premature baby to care for would never have been allowed to leave hospital. Social workers would have told her, firmly and

kindly, that raising children is tough enough for a loving couple with a nice house and a picket fence living in suburbia. Years ago, someone would have explained to the young woman that this was not a doll she had been entrusted with, but a precious human life. Nowadays, however, our new no-fault society has convinced us that not only are teenage mothers able to raise babies alone, it is their God-given right to do so. Not only that, we should actually pay them to do it, and the heck with God-given right of the infant to any kind of a decent existence.

In those bad old days, before she left hospital, someone should have pointed out to the young woman that just as everyone makes mistakes, so too, everyone should be given a second chance to make good. They would have pointed out that hundreds of loving, childless couples are waiting for a chance to take a child such as hers into their homes and hearts. These days, however, it is politically incorrect to mention such a compassionate notion. We are all so worried about the rights of the flighty teen mom that no one, apparently, gives a passing thought to the poor infant.

There are, of course, women who through death and desertion are forced to raise children alone. And many do marvelous work in doing so. In such cases, society can and should take an active role in providing support. But there are only so many fatherless children that society can afford to care for. Paying generous welfare rates to single mothers, giving them free daycare and subsidized housing simply makes the problems worse. ...

Who are all those kids (living in poverty)? They're the ones whose single mothers are on welfare because no matter how compassionate we are, welfare rates will always be at the poverty line because we can't, as a society, afford to pay

more. Nor should we. Not only is it ruinous financially, it is socially catastrophic for children to be raised without a fathers influence. And yes, again, I know some women are forced to do so through circumstance. But it surely isn't a lifestyle choice. ...

Sometimes being compassionate doesn't mean hand-outs and free daycare for teen moms when firm guidelines and serious counselling on birth control are what's needed. It's time to drop the trendy social engineering in favour of pragmatic solutions to child welfare." (End of extract)

The words are strong and reflect the frustration and guilt that many must feel and I suspect that some expert will suggest that the mother had a low self esteem and needs treatment. There is no doubt that she needs help but I only hope that we learn from this tragedy and start taking a serious look at what happened and why.

Something is desperately wrong and it needs to be corrected but this is a complex problem which has no simple solution and it will take time. The starting point, however, is to acknowledge that there is a problem and that we, as a society, are all at fault.

What Makes A Strong Country

During the last U.S. Presidential election, Hillary Clinton gave a clever call to action when she stated: "We should stop talking about family values and start acting in ways which values families." Her assessment was that too many things are going wrong despite the fact that we have the ability to make more things right. The family condition is threatened by a host of social ills which can affect some or all of its family members.

To understand what makes a strong country, we should also understand what makes a country weak. Youth unemployment, youth crime, strained health care system and an aging society, high dependency on social welfare, spousal and child abuse, teen suicide, 50% divorce rate, 75% breakdown rate of common-law relationships and a 30% high school drop out rate are all areas of serious concern to Canadians.

Many of the problems facing Canada today did not happen over night. Some have developed over a long period of time in response to changes in our social environment and our social values. One of the most dramatic changes has occurred in the structure of the family. In 1961, 65% of all Canadian families consisted of a male wage-earner and a stay-at-home spouse. In 1991, this family structure accounted for only 12% of families. In addition, more than 70% of pre-school children are now in non-parental care arrangements on a regular basis. This is only one area of major societal change, however, the correlation between child health and the structure of the family provides powerful evidence that strong families make a strong country.

By breaking the taboos used against unwed motherhood and casual divorce, we have created the world's most dangerous environment for children - a new fatherless society filling up with children who are so emotionally damaged by their parents behavior that they may have a lot of trouble making commitments and forming families themselves.

The Murphy Brown argument is now over, and Dan Quayle has won. An avalanche of evidence shows that lone-parent children are far more vulnerable than two-parent children are, to all sorts of damage, in all income levels and under all kinds of conditions.

Child poverty is one of the most talked about social conditions in Canada and for many, the term brings visions of starving African children dying in the desert. Child poverty is however a political term. The real condition is not just child poverty, it is family poverty and we do have a problem. Many families in Canada do not have the means to provide the basic necessities of life and they rely very heavily on our welfare system and social programs.

In Canada, we do not have a formal poverty line as such, but rather Statistics Canada has established low income cut off levels or LICO's. The LICO is determined in reference to the family size, the place of residence and the cost of providing basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. For example, a family of 4 living in a large urban area is said to be living in poverty if the family income is below \$31,753. For a family of 2 in a large urban area, the LICO is \$21,092. Despite the LICO's, many families have incomes well below these levels (See Appendix 1). There is no doubt, however, that although child poverty does not cause poor outcomes, it is undeniably an exacerbating factor which cannot be ignored.

What Makes A Strong Family

A strong family starts with a strong relationship between a man and a woman which includes a value system to guide the healthy development of their children. The success in raising children is a reflection of those family values and how they were applied. Child poverty and the general health of our children are very high priorities for Canadians because we know intuitively that poor outcomes of children translate directly into higher costs for our health care, social program and criminal justice systems. There is no doubt that children today are at high risk, and even under assault, when you consider the violence and neglect, the breakup of families,

alcohol, tobacco, drug and sexual abuse, greed, materialism and spiritual emptiness.

Children are not born bad but are a product of the environment that we provide for them. We know that physical and mental health, behavioral skills, coping skills, social skills, reasoning skills, and cognitive skills all begin to be established very early in life. We also want our children to be socially well adjusted, realistic, confident, and healthy so that they can adapt more easily into social life. The more successful we are in bringing up children in good physical, mental and social health, the better they will be able to cope with the challenges they will face during the rest of their lives.

Chapter 7

INVESTING IN CHILDREN

In 1994, the United Nations celebrated the “Year of the Family” but considering the trends in family life, I saw it not as much a celebration, as it was a warning. The family has evolved over time to reflect the changes in social norms, values and moral standards. Some have characterized the last 25 years as a social experiment which has failed, while others see it as the continued evolution of individual democratic rights and freedoms. If there is any consensus, it would be that our children have been victims of our social evolution. Just as it has been a slow process to get here, so too will be the task of repairing the damage. As a complex challenge, it will take a broad range of initiatives and the unqualified commitment of governments, business, the community and families.

Tax Breaks For Families

Public opinion polls reveal a very high interest of parents, where both worked outside of the home, to have one stay at home and care for their children. Decima Research found that 70% of parents with pre-school children, where both were working, said that if they could they would choose to have one of them stay at home and provide direct parental care. The barrier seemed to be giving up the income of one spouse. The economic argument in most cases is weak at best and it seems that a modest tax incentive in some form might make the difference.

In early 1994, I tabled a Bill C-256 in the House of Commons to amend the Income Tax Act to provide for income splitting between spouses where one provided direct parental care in the home. A compendium Bill, C-269, was also tabled to provide Canada Pension Plan benefits eligibility on the income split from a spouse. Bill C-256 came up for debate in the Parliament on October 5, 1994 and the following is an extract from the speech I delivered which addresses the reasons why stay-at-home parents need a tax break.

HANSARD - HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATES
OCTOBER 5, 1994 - AMENDMENT TO INCOME TAX
ACT

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South) moved that Bill C-256, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (transfer of income to spouse), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House of Commons to present for debate at second reading my private member's bill, C-256.

Every member of Parliament looks forward to an opportunity to bring before the House matters of importance not only to themselves but to all Canadians. Bill C-256 is a proposal which is foremost about the family and which also has implications for jobs, child care, tax equity and the cost of health, social services and criminal justice.

The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family. However, in my view this is not as much a celebration as it is a warning.

In the last 30 years changes in our social and economic environment have been dramatic. Family and social values

have clearly eroded. We no longer feel safe in our communities. Demand for social services has expanded beyond our means and family breakdown has become the norm. Everyone knows a lone-parent, but did you know that 60% of them are living in poverty?

In 1961, 65% of families with children under six years old had one stay at home parent. In 1991, 30 years later, this type of family structure accounted for only 12% of families. In addition, today more than 70% of preschool children are now in non-parental care arrangements on a regular basis while parents work. Much of this movement has been caused by economic circumstances. Growth in incomes has been stagnating in real terms since the mid 1970s and younger families have been hit the hardest. Their incomes are in dramatic decline and the incidence of poverty is increasing.

For example, among families with a head under age 25 the incidence of poverty nearly doubled from 21% to 37% between 1981 and 1991. I am therefore extremely pleased that today the Minister for Human Resources Development reaffirmed our commitment to the elimination of child poverty. He has clearly stated that this is our top priority in the restructuring of our social programs.

It should be noted however that as personal home parenting becomes increasingly uneconomic, it is being portrayed as decreasingly desirable. Instead of recognizing that there may be problems with our priorities, we somehow rationalize that the choice is best for the children. In addition, there are a number of other contributing factors to the family and social ills we are experiencing today. We appear to have designed most of our services to kick in after problems become apparent. By then the need to respond is urgent but the remedial efforts are often unsuccessful.

According to the May 1994 report of the Ontario premier's council on health, well-being and social justice, critical development outcomes are rooted in early experiences and influences. These outcomes include good physical health, the ability to learn, the ability to cope with stress, being able to relate well with others and to have a positive self-esteem. Where, how and with whom children spend their time in the early years has a major impact on their healthy development. A secure attachment to a nurturing adult is essential and who is better than one of the parents to provide that care.

Dr. Fraser Mustard, chair of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, has long advocated focusing some of our limited resources to children in the first three years of life. Their extensive research shows dramatic links between future problems and poor child care during infancy. Dr. Mustard cites a 19 year study of early childhood enrichment in the United States. As a result, the group of children had a higher proportion who graduated from high school and went on to college. There was a 50% lower incidence of mental health problems, 40% fewer on welfare, and there were 50% fewer teenage pregnancies.

Dr. Penelope Leach, renowned author on child care, masterfully stated the case when she said: "The real issue is not motherhood or career, but something closer to parenthood and paid work". Today, children are more a part of paid work than of home life. As such, they are currently of secondary importance in our society. Those priorities will have to shift.

The critical importance of quality child care is particularly dramatized by the facts related to young unmarried mothers. Each year over 20,000 unmarried women aged 12 to 19 give birth with the majority choosing to raise the children themselves. As a result, most do not finish their education and

are likely to become dependent on subsidized housing and welfare. Their offspring are at a higher risk of being premature or low birth weight, more likely to experience difficulty in school, and more likely to become single parents themselves. These facts raise serious questions. What has become of the traditional family? Are we fully aware of the potential consequences to our children's future development by having both parents work? Is it really up to governments to take the responsibility for the future development of our children? Has society decided that managing the family home and caring for preschool children is no longer important?

Who would dare say that a stay at home parent does not work? A parent working in the home has chosen a very honourable profession which contributes more to the quality of our society than most jobs. Yet it is a profession which is not specifically compensated in recognition of the value of the work done. That is the reason why I have tabled this bill. It is an attempt to provide a modest financial benefit to families who choose to have one parent work in the home and care for preschool children. As a consequence of the bill, jobs in the external work force would be freed up for those who urgently need them. In addition, child care spaces would be freed up to partially address the critical shortage we are now experiencing. Take the example of two working parents with two children in daycare with the lower income earning spouse earning \$25,000. After income tax, child care expenses and the cost of employment, the net take home pay is less than \$100 per week.

Parents in this situation often question why they are sacrificing so much for so little. Their lives are driven by a child care schedule. They rush in the morning to get their child ready, they rush to deliver the children to daycare, they rush to work to put in a full day and they cannot delay leaving

work because the children must be picked up and taken home to be fed dinner. By the time they settle in the home, it is time to get the children ready for bed. Parents may want to spend family time with children but often it is the case that the children are too tired or not in the mood to play when the parents have the time.

What do parents do when their children are sick? That much stress cannot be helping the family unit. The amount of time that parents and children spend together has dropped by 40% in a single generation. As a rationalization we dreamed up the notion of quality time. However, that implies that to spend a small amount of time with a child is satisfactory if it is quality time whereas if you are around the child all of the time only some of that time is quality time. That kind of thinking is simply flawed.

Economic considerations are important, but in certain circumstances parents are struggling to decide whether the modest take home pay of the lower income earning spouse is worth all the family sacrifices they are making. Although the vast majority of parents do work, a 1991 Decima poll found that 70% of women would choose to provide direct parental care if they could. This bill would provide a financial bridge to assist those parents, and I stress, who would like the option to make that choice.

It should also be noted that our present income tax system in fact discriminates against one income families. The child care expense deduction permits two income families to claim up to \$5,000 of child care costs per child under the age of seven regardless of how much income they have. No such deduction is available to one income families due to the false assumption that they have no child care costs. Child care costs exist not because both spouses work but rather because

children exist. The child care expense deduction has an inverse relationship to need. That means that the higher the family income, the higher the savings to the two income family.

Consider also the case where two neighbours each have children. One neighbour can be paid to take care of the children of the other neighbour and vice versa. Each family then gets to claim the child care expense deduction because they care for each other's children. Ironically, however, you do not get any deduction when you care for your own children. This favoured tax treatment may produce financial savings for those who care for the children of others but it does nothing for those who care for their own children. The child care expense deduction should be means tested and extended to all families to address the profound inequities in our Income Tax Act. This initiative would provide equitable benefits to all families based on financial need. Accordingly, I will shortly be tabling in the House a motion to effect this change and I hope it will have the support of all hon. members.

Bill C-256 specifically seeks to amend the Income Tax Act to permit one spouse to split up to \$25,000 of their income with the spouse working in the home and caring for at least one dependent child who has not commenced full time attendance at school. As a result of the graduated tax brackets presently in our income tax laws, this would result in a lower tax burden on family income. Depending on the level of incomes and deductions the benefit could be as much as \$3,500 per year or about \$65 per week.

In the example I cited if instead of forgoing \$100 per week of net take home pay it were reduced to only \$35 per week the option to have one parent work in the home would be much

more attractive to the family. The income split with the spouse working in the home would be treated as self-employed income and as such would not be eligible for unemployment insurance. The income would however qualify for the purchase of RRSPs.

Under the Canada Pension Plan Act this income would not qualify for CPP benefits. I have however tabled in the House Bill C-269 which would change the CPP act to make such earnings pensionable. That change will require approval of two-thirds of the provinces representing 50% of the population, plus Quebec which operates its own Quebec pension plan.

If we truly believe that working in the home and caring for preschool children is an important job, should we also not acknowledge the fairness of providing pension benefits?

The benefits of this bill do not stop there however. This is not just a bill which would give a tax break to some Canadians. If a lower income earner withdraws from the external workforce to work in the home, a job would be freed up or created depending on how we looked at it. With 10.7% of our workforce unemployed the importance of job creation cannot be overstated.

Furthermore the person filling the vacated job will likely have been on UI which can be up to \$429 a week, or on welfare which can be up to \$663 per week. Under these circumstances the government will in fact be saving on the cost of these social benefits.

As well the new taxpayer would not likely have the same level of child care expenses, which means that more tax

would be paid by the person on the same job than by the person who formerly held that job.

A further consequence of the bill is the freeing up of child care spaces. In its red book the government has committed to create 50,000 child care spaces per year for three years following the achievement of 3% growth in GDP. Since that growth will be reached this year these 150,000 spaces will be created at a cost of \$1.4 billion split between the federal and provincial governments. That represents \$9,600 per space per year. It is also expected that the users will pay \$2,400 per year for the space. Therefore, in total each of these spaces will cost \$12,000. That is a fair indicator of just how much value should be attributed to caring for a child in the home.

While it is certainly true that more daycare provision would increase the number of mothers in the external workforce, it is also true that more financial help with the costs of being a parent would reduce that number no matter how much affordable daycare was available. In the long term it is crucial for us to realize that direct parental care will also contribute to savings in the areas of health, social programs and criminal justice. Each year it costs literally billions of dollars to respond to the problems rooted in poor child development. Today we face serious challenges related to the family which are complex. We must however remember that there are no simple solutions. We need a range of initiatives spanning both preventive and remedial approaches. Bill C-256 represents an important preventive approach which recognizes the value of work in the home, creates jobs and provides child care spaces. (End of extract)

The Bill did not come to a vote in the House but the interest and support were too large to ignore. To continue the debate, I intend to reintroduce both Bill C-256 and Bill C-269 during

the 36th Parliament. A copy of Bill C-256 (income splitting) is in Appendix 2 and a copy of Bill C-269 (CPP benefits for stay at home parents) is in Appendix 3.

Convinced that the concept of a tax break was still the best approach, I had also submitted a motion to the House calling for a Caregiver Tax Credit for those who provided care in the home to preschool children, the chronically ill, the aged or the disabled. Family responsibilities for its members are from cradle to grave and the tax credit approach represented a less complicated tax benefit to explain and to garner support. The following is an extract of the speech I delivered on my Motion M-30:

HANSARD - HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATES
MAY 29, 1996 - AMENDMENT TO INCOME TAX ACT

Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider amending the Income Tax Act to provide a caregiver tax credit for those who provide care in the home for preschool children, the disabled, the chronically ill or the aged.

He said: Mr. Speaker, over the past two years I have presented a petition to the House of Commons which basically states that managing the family home and caring for preschool children is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society. The petition also states the Income Tax Act discriminates against families that choose to provide care in the home to preschool children, the chronically ill, the disabled or the aged. The petition therefore calls on Parliament pursue tax initiatives which would do just that.

Motion No. 30 is a votable motion of the House of Commons which asks the House of Commons and the government to consider the advisability of this motion and to provide a caregiver tax credit to those who choose to provide care in the home to preschool children, the chronically ill, the disabled or the aged.

I will give a bit of background. Last weekend I had the opportunity of attending a wedding of my cousin. As they exchanged vows I began to consider what family really meant to me. This is a young couple starting their lives together. I wondered when they exchanged their vows did they automatically become a family.

I looked around the church and I found there were many children there and I realized even more that family means children. As I looked at my family members and relatives I saw an aunt whose husband had been disabled, chronically ill, and she had to leave her work to care for him. Tragically he passed away. I saw a sister who is married but who decided not to have children. I saw my brother who has daughters, but both he and his wife decided to continue their careers because a parent lived next door to them who could care for their daughters during their formative years. I saw my grandmother who is now 95 years old, who after my grandfather passed away had to leave her home because she was no longer able to care for it. Then she stayed with my mother. After some time as she needed more and more care it was evident she needed institutionalized care.

I also saw a cousin who presently lives common-law and who has no children. Then I looked at my own family. My dear wife and I will celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary this year. We have three lovely children. My wife took 13 years

off from her career to help raise those children to be fine young people.

The issue surrounding Motion No. 30 is family responsibilities. They are lifelong responsibilities, from cradle to grave. They reflect family values and social norms and values and choices related to children and other family members who may be chronically ill, aged or disabled.

I quote Dr. Benjamin Spock: "Children are made to love. Parents love children because they remember being loved so much by their own parents. Despite all the hard work, taking care of children and seeing them grow up to develop to be fine young people gives most parents their greatest satisfaction in life. To reflect on children we see that this is creation, this is our visible immortality".

Dr. Penelope Leach is the author of *Children First*, a wonderful book which states that if couples are contemplating having children, one thing they must understand is they must be prepared to put the interests of their child ahead of their own. This is very difficult and in many cases not possible in today's society.

What is the current situation in Canada with regard to families and children? I come across many cases in which people have said: "Both of us are working. We have our children in child care spaces but after child care expenses, after income taxes, after the cost of employment, my net take home pay is so small I really do not know why we are doing this". We have a situation now in which the drop-out rate in high school is around 32%. We have growing concern about young offenders and crime in general. We have concern about the literacy rate in Canada, which is presently at about the grade six level. In 1968, 68% of families with preschool children

had one parent staying in the home and caring for those children. Twenty-five years later in 1993 that reduced to only 12%. We have social agencies everywhere for behavioral, learning and social skills. Schools even have full time psychologists now. Families are having increasing difficulty parenting their children.

The Standing Committee on Health is presently studying preventive strategies for the good health of children. We heard a number of witnesses. I refer to a couple of the points raised. There was the point that quality daycare cannot be provided or delivered without government subsidy, the reason being the salaries paid to qualified caregivers averages somewhere around only \$21,000. That was presented to us by Martha Friendly of the U of T child resource centre. She confirmed that the demand for subsidized child care is much greater than the availability.

Families are different. Choice and options are essential and desirable. Dr. Fraser Mustard of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research also came before the committee. He told us about research that clearly shows there are factors occurring during the first three years of life that have a significant impact on the likelihood of positive outcomes of children, cognitive skills, social skills, behavioral skills, coping skills, mental and physical health.

We also had Dr. Mark Genuis of the National Foundation for Family Research and Education. He told us about a meta-analysis, a analysis of all the studies done on this subject matter. He told the committee that if a child had more than 20 hours per week disruption of the secure attachment with the caregiver, there was evidence of increased likelihood of negative impact on socio-emotional development, behavioral bonding, consistent, secure attachment to an adult.

The Globe and Mail April 22, 1996 reported on a U.S. study, the most far reaching and comprehensive dealing with the first 15 months of infancy. It said the likelihood of a troubled mother-child bond can be increased by child care that is of poor quality, that changes several times or that extends to more than 10 hours per week. It also said that after the mother as primary caregiver, child care centres were ranked lowest in quality whereas fathers, relatives or other caregivers in the family home were ranked the highest.

This is not a situation of black and white. This is a situation of probabilities. We can have many situations turning out different ways but we are talking about the likelihood of outcomes. It is important for us to ensure there are high likelihoods of positive outcomes for the development of our children.

As legislators our job is to provide optimum flexibility to families to choose options suited to their situation and to their values. What if more families could afford to provide direct parental care? In the short term, it would free jobs possibly for those on welfare or for those who really need the jobs. It would free the demand on child care spaces and institutionalized care spaces. It would reduce stress on the family and, most important, it would recognize the value of work in the home.

In the recent census we included a question to get information about the amount of unpaid work. In the long term health, social and criminal costs to Canada would decrease significantly because of the more positive outcomes of our children. It would create healthier, happier families. It would allow families to better discharge their lifelong duties. It would be an investment in the healthy outcomes of our children and it would constitute a significant saving to the Canadian taxpayer.

The viability of M-30 needs to be assessed not from a financial perspective, but from a balanced perspective, taking into account both social and fiscal realities. The finance minister said to the House in his very first speech: "Good fiscal policy makes good social policy and good social policy makes good fiscal policy". Now is the time to recognize that reality. Now is the time to stop defending the status quo based on soft mathematics. Now is the time to have tax reform which restores fairness and equity to all Canadians. Now is the time to reflect social priorities in our tax policy.

The recent bill on the employment insurance program showed some movement on behalf of legislators in Canada to recognize the value of work in the home and the importance of caregiving in the home. That reform showed this by recognizing and offering for the first time training assistance and wage subsidies to parents who have taken parental leaves to provide that parental care.

In October 1994, I had a private member's Bill C-256, which proposed income splitting between couples so that one could stay at home and care for preschool children. During the debate on the bill the finance department spokesman came before the House and dismissed it on the basis that the idea was too costly and because we had already provided many tax breaks to the family.

In my view, no assessment of the social realities was given, no recognition to long term benefits and no mention of anything other than it being simply too costly. Parents know intuitively that direct parental care is optimal. In a recent Angus Reid survey 70% of parents, where both were working and had preschool children, said that if they could they would choose to have one stay at home to provide direct parental care for their child.

I am not naive on this issue. The pie is not getting bigger. We do not have more money to spend. That means that we have to work smarter with what we have. Therefore, we need to reassess the propriety for existing deductions, tax credits and other tax benefits incorporated into the Income Tax Act. We need to establish whether tax breaks will be given on the basis of need and family income, such as is done with the old age security, the age credit and the new seniors' benefit which was announced in the last budget. We need to consolidate existing resources and allocate them to where we get the optimum benefit for all Canadians. These changes will result in stronger, healthier families. I believe that if the family is strong the deficit would be gone. ...

Tax reform is not an option, it is an imperative. Therefore on behalf of the traditional family I ask the finance minister to heed his own words when he said that "good social policy makes good fiscal policy and good fiscal policy makes good social policy".

Now is the time for tax policy to reflect good social policy and the best interests of the Canadian family. (End of extract)

Motion M-30 came to a recorded vote in the House on November 5, 1996 and passed 129 to 63. This was a great victory for the family and provides a good foundation for renewed debate in the House of Commons on the importance of the family.

The Alcohol Risk

Caring for a child starts long before birth. The health of the couple is reflected in their genes and whether they smoke, drink or take drugs before, during or after pregnancy, may influence the health of a child. Health experts also tell us that

women who receive prenatal care, especially during the first trimester, are more likely to deliver healthy, full-term, normal-weight babies, while women who do not receive adequate prenatal care are more than twice as likely to have low birth weight babies (less than 5 ½ lbs). Low birth weight babies represent less than 10% of all births but account for over 60% of all infant deaths. Inadequate prenatal care also results in high rates of preventable problems, including congenital abnormalities, respiratory tract infections and learning difficulties. A low birth weight baby can cost the health care system as much as \$200,000 for the required special care needs.

The formative years very much include the prenatal period and the health of the mother and the quality of care taken during pregnancy, can affect the healthy development of the fetus. Low birth weight and developmental abnormalities are serious potential problems which are avoidable with the proper prenatal care. One related aspect to fetal development is the matter of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. The potential impacts are so serious that I developed Bill C-337 to require health warning labels on the containers of alcoholic beverages. The Bill was tabled in the House on June 20, 1995 and debated on December 7, 1995. The following is an extract of the speech I delivered in Parliament which describes the potential impacts of alcohol misuse especially as it relates to children:

HANSARD - HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATES -
DECEMBER 7, 1995 - FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.) moved that Bill C-337, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (warning on alcoholic beverage containers) be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, beverage alcohol is the only consumer product in Canada known to cause harm if misused that does not alert the consumer to this fact.

What are the consequences in Canada due to the misuse of alcohol? Based on the most recent data available from Health Canada, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and from the Addiction Research Foundation, the facts are as follows: 38,261 psychiatric and general hospital admissions; 17,080 cases of alcohol dependence syndrome; 966 cases of toxic poisoning; 19,163 deaths directly or indirectly caused by alcohol misuse; 10% of all neoplasms or tumours; 5% of all diseases of the circulatory system; 15% of all diseases of the respiratory system; 5% of all fetal defects; 45% of all motor vehicle accidents; 48% of all drivers killed in accidents are killed as a result of alcohol consumption, which means that 2,000 have been killed and over 10,000 injured in only one year; 40% of all accidental falls; 30% of accidents due to fire; 30% of all suicides; 60% of all homicides; 50% of incidents of family violence and one in six divorces are all caused by alcohol consumption.

It is indeed tragic that one in ten deaths in Canada, or the deaths of about 19,000 Canadians are from alcohol related causes each year. All of this is due to the irresponsible use of alcoholic beverages. It is costing Canada an estimated \$15 billion each year in higher health, social, justice and lost productivity costs, not to mention the devastating impact on family, friends and society as a whole.

I know the effect that this can have on a family. My own father abused alcohol most of his adult life, but we are not afraid of him anymore. Years ago following one of his violent rages, he lost touch with reality and is living out the rest of his life in a home. I have not seen my father for more than 10

years because he no longer could recognize who I was. Today he has a new family: three bottles of vodka, one for each meal.

Bill C-337 seeks to require that containers of all alcoholic beverages sold in Canada display the following message: Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs a person's ability to operate machinery or an automobile and may cause health problems or cause birth defects during pregnancy.

There are many reasons that we should have health warning labels on alcoholic beverages. The costs and other impacts of the irresponsible use of alcohol are far too great to ignore. At a time when all governments are seeking to reduce the costs of health, social, justice and lost productivity, we need to pursue, and I stress preventative, rather than remedial strategies. We need to let the consumers know that health experts recognize the hazards of alcohol use. We need to inform consumers about the risks of alcohol use. Failure to label alcohol when medical drugs, foods, cleaners, solvents and other dangerous products all carry health warnings falsely assures consumers that alcoholic beverages are safe at all times. All levels of governments and the alcoholic beverage industry itself have a social, moral and societal responsibility to reduce the misuse of alcohol. Labelling is a reaffirmation in the ability of consumers to make responsible decisions. Labelling will also promote consumer consistency and indeed will lead to changes in drinking behavior.

Labels in themselves are an integral part of any comprehensive strategy to promote the responsible use of alcoholic beverages. Any prevention program would be incomplete without these health warnings. In the words of Denny Boyd, columnist for the Vancouver Sun: ``The intended purpose of warning labels on alcoholic containers is

to act as a consumer lighthouse sending a signal of impending danger". Labels represent an efficient way to continually remind consumers of the need to drink responsibly. As one element of our overall preventative strategy, it could be implemented quickly and efficiently with the potential of reaching all consumers and with a repeated effect.

I will take a moment to talk about fetal alcohol syndrome. All Canadians are well familiar with the problems associated with drinking and driving and that is due to the relentless education of consumers. But there is another problem virtually unknown yet far more tragic. It is called fetal alcohol syndrome, otherwise known as FAS.

In 1992 there was a study called "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, A Preventable Tragedy" produced by the House of Commons standing committee on health and welfare. The report states: "There is no question that maternal alcohol consumption can have devastating impacts on the fetus. The basic fact is that when a pregnant woman drinks, her unborn child drinks also; that is, the alcohol in the mother's bloodstream circulates through the placenta into the bloodstream of the fetus. It is possible the blood alcohol level in the fetus will remain at an elevated level for a longer period than that of the mother because the immature fetal liver metabolizes the alcohol more slowly."

Research shows that 5% of all fetal defects are due to alcohol consumption during pregnancy. According to Health Canada, FAS occurs in about one in 500 live births. Therefore, it is in fact more prevalent than Down's Syndrome which occurs in about one in 600 live births. FAS children can reflect the following: severe neurological disorders, social dysfunction, permanent behavioral problems, reduced lifespan, restricted brain development, learning disorders, hyperactivity, mental

retardation, pre and post natal growth retardation, speech and vision impairment and physical deformities.

In addition to retarded growth, FAS children usually display facial distortions, including a small head, small wide-set eyes, flattened cheekbones, a very thin upper lip and no groove between the upper lip and nose. FAS is estimated to cost \$1.5 million during the lifetime of an FAS child. FAS is estimated to cost Canadians \$2.7 billion each year in terms of increased health, special education and social services costs. There is another aspect to this. Fetal alcohol effects or FAE is very similar to FAS, with the same range of problems in a less severe form, but without the characteristic facial abnormalities. FAE occurs two to three times more frequently than does FAS.

With regard to the alcohol industry, there is little dispute in the medical profession that alcohol consumption during pregnancy can have harmful effects to the fetus. The message they are trying to get out is that there is no recommended safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and that drinking during pregnancy can cause alcohol related birth defects, including FAS and FAE. Both these diseases are totally preventable. I want to repeat that, both FAS and FAE are totally preventable. In the words of the alcohol beverage industry itself, drinking responsibly could mean not drinking at all. ...

In 1988 the U.S. government passed legislation requiring health warning labels to be placed on the containers of alcoholic beverages. Implemented in 1989, a series of studies have been conducted to detect the impacts on knowledge, attitude and behavioral changes. Although early studies showed little effects, as the years went by literally dozens of

research studies have started to show progressively improving results. Here are some examples:

In December 1993 the Journal of Public Policy and Marketing in a report on public attitudes toward alcohol control since the warning labels were mandated in 1988 said: "It is concluded that the label is serving the goal set out for it, to inform the public of the hazards associated with alcohol consumption".

In 1993-94 the International Quarterly of Community Health Education in a report on the awareness and knowledge of alcohol beverage warning labels among homeless persons stated: "Age and level of alcohol consumption were each associated with label awareness and content familiarity suggesting that alcohol beverage warning labels may be reaching homeless persons".

The final example comes from the March 1994 International Conference on the Reduction of Drug Related Harm. In the research paper "Mandated Container Warnings as an Alcohol Related Harm Reduction Policy" it finds: "Within the U.S. results indicate an association between seeing the label and displaying behaviors relevant to limited drunk driving. Limited drinking before driving, 68%, was associated with seeing the label in the last 12 months; limited driving after drinking was even more significantly associated".

The evidence is mounting and very powerful. That is why the U.S. started to use warning labels in 1989. That is why indeed in Canada, the Yukon and Northwest Territories started to use warning labels in 1991. That is why 77.5% of Canadians surveyed by the Addiction Research Foundation in 1994 said they would support health warning labels on alcohol beverage containers. Why? Because Canadians know that warning labels work.

This initiative of having health warning labels on the containers of alcoholic beverages is not a recent subject in Canada. It was first raised in 1976 by the then Minister of Health, the Hon. Marc Lalonde. In 1992, as I mentioned earlier, the House of Commons standing committee on health and welfare recommended health warning labels to the government.

How do current legislators feel? On May 23, 1995 the B.C. Minister of Health wrote the following to the federal Minister of Health: "I am writing to you in regards to alcohol warning labels. This was a topic of our discussion at the provincial, territorial ministers of health meeting held in Vancouver April 10 and 11, 1995.

There was unanimous agreement that warning labels should be pursued by the federal government".

I repeat, the provincial ministers of health unanimously agreed that warning labels should be pursued by the federal government. In addition, the federal Minister of Health has clearly stated her strong support for health warning labels for the containers of alcoholic beverages.

The alcoholic beverage industry feels the consumer has the burden of proof that health warning labels work. I believe the burden of proof that they do not work must fall on the industry. If it cannot provide that burden of proof, then today I call on the industry to discharge its social, moral and business responsibility and voluntarily comply with this labelling recommendation.

Bill C-337 is the first piece of legislation on warning labels that has ever reached this point in our legislative system. The bill no longer belongs to me. It now belongs to all the members of Parliament. We cannot afford to miss the

opportunity to do the right thing. I humbly ask for members' support to pass Bill C-337 today at second reading so that we may more rigorously pursue the facts through public hearings before the Standing Committee on Health. In this way, members of Parliament who are not in the cabinet can once again demonstrate to Canadians that we can and do make a positive contribution to the well-being of all Canadians. (End of extract)

Bill C-337 passed at Second Reading in the House of Commons on December 7, 1995 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Health - (The Bill was carried forward to the Second Session of the 35th Parliament as Bill C-222). The Committee heard witnesses but before study of the Bill was completed, Parliament dissolved. Support for the Bill had come from a broad range of groups including the Canadian Medical Association, The Canadian Nurses Association, The Addiction Research Foundation, The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and the 10 Provincial Ministers of Health. A copy of the Bill can be found in Appendix 4.

A by-product of the proposed legislation was the development of the national, public education and awareness campaign called "Drink Smart Canada". The purpose of the program is to promote awareness of the pervasive impacts of alcohol misuse and to encourage Canadians to play a role in addressing the problem. The simple message of the campaign is: "If you are in the company of a friend, family member or acquaintance, who is drinking and becoming at risk of hurting themselves or others, you should intervene in an appropriate fashion to ensure that they do not become just another tragic statistic." As of September, 1997, the Drink Smart Canada campaign has earned the support of over 350 cities across Canada.

Breakdown Of The Family

In 1967, there were about 11,000 divorces in Canada. Thirty years later, 50% of marriages, or approximately 90,000 per year, end up in divorce. During that time there has also been a significant shift towards common-law relationships. The marriage rate in Canada has dropped 39% in the last 25 years. Recent research has shown that common-law relationships last an average of 5 years and have a break up rate 50% higher than that of marriages. That means that 75% of common-law relationships split up within five years.

When you consider that 60% of these couples have children, it is not surprising that we have a growing level of lone-parent families in Canada. Lone-parent families represent about 11.3% of all families in Canada but tragically they account for 42% of all children living in poverty. In addition, the Department of Justice report said that over 70% of Young Offenders come from broken families. The statistics also show that nearly 50% of all children will experience divorce or family breakdown at least once before they reach the age of 18. Today about one in four children do not live at home with both of their biological parents.

One of the biggest reasons for the increase in divorce in Canada came as a result of divorce law changes instituted in 1986. Under the law, the grounds for divorce were changed to two basic sections. Firstly, automatic divorce for adultery or mental or physical cruelty. Secondly, breakdown of marriage after one year separation (no specific reason required). This is commonly referred to as no-fault divorce. There are a variety of causes for divorce but there are 4 particular causes to which divorce is most attributed. They are domestic abuse, adultery, alcohol abuse and financial problems.

Approximately 25% of all divorces are attributed to spousal abuse, both physical and mental. Spousal abuse costs Canada about \$2.1 billion per year in terms of increased health care costs, social program costs and criminal justice costs. Research has shown that 50% of domestic violence is caused by alcohol misuse and that 60% of violence occurs in common-law relationships.

Research shows that 20% of divorces are due to infidelity or adultery. A recent survey commissioned by CTV found that 25% of respondents said they would be unfaithful if the opportunity presented itself. It should be noted that under the current laws of Canada, adultery is automatic grounds for divorce.

Alcohol and substance abuse account for 15% of all divorces. It should be noted that 50% of spousal abuse and 65% of child abuse are also caused by alcohol misuse. Substance abuse can in many cases be dealt with. One can only speculate how many divorces may have been averted had appropriate treatment for substance abuse been made available when it was detected.

It is not uncommon for marriages to find themselves in financial hardship. Approximately 20% of divorces are due to the stresses brought on by financial hardship. Most couples who have been through a divorce would probably admit that the divorce did not and in most cases cannot solve the financial problems. The situation is often made worse by the divorce simply because the costs of the divorce itself and the increased ongoing cost of living after breakup. The saying goes that 2 can live as cheaply as one. The problem is that the lifestyle lived rises to the level of the income of the two persons. When those two people separate, instantaneously

there is a whole host of additional one-time and ongoing costs which must now be financed by the same two incomes.

By far the most crucial impact of divorce is the potential effect on children. Statistics show that 60% of breakdowns involved children and by every measure that we have, it is clear that divorce does have a negative impact on children. For example children of divorce are 2 to 3 times more likely to experience poverty and insecurity; they experience a negative impact on their capacity to love another person; there is a significant negative impact on their educational achievement; they are less likely to go to college or university; they exhibit difficulties in establishing relationships with others; they are more likely to go through a divorce or family breakup themselves; they are more likely to have children out of wedlock; and they are more likely to become young offenders.

These facts were reinforced by the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth released in early 1997 by Statistics Canada and the Department of Human Resources Development. Young children in Canada raised by a lone-parent are showing higher rates of behavioral problems and school failure than other youngsters. Of the 2.8 million children aged 4 to 11 in Canada, about 458,000 are living in lone-parent families. The study also found that one in six of those had some form of conduct disorder such as engaging in physical violence against a person or property. Of the 324,000 children aged 6 to 11 raised by lone-parent families, one in 9 had repeated a grade in school. The national average for repeating a grade among this age group is one in 16. Taken together, just over 25% of children in Canada had at least one problem such as anxiety, depression or physical aggressiveness. For children living in lone-parent families, 41% have experienced at least one of these problems.

The Survey found that a hostile parent was far more damaging to a child's social behavior and ability to form relationships than any aspect of the family's background. A child's development with a positive parent in a poor family was at least as good as one with a negative parent in a less disadvantaged family. It also found that preschool children who come from dysfunctional families are 2.3 times more likely to be slow in developing vocabulary which is a measure of success in early school years.

Research has shown that poverty can aggravate the problems in lone-parent families, but it is not the fundamental cause or the only contributing factor. The Centre for Studies of Children, who treat children with behavior problems, agrees and confirmed this fact in their own case in which only about 15% of their patients were poor. A child raised by a lone-parent is also 1.5 times more likely to face emotional or other problems compared with children being raised by two parents regardless of whether the families were poor.

The impact of fatherless homes is also an important issue. As we know, custody arrangements usually favour women and as a result, there is a significant withdrawal in the influence that a father has on the children. Even in joint custody arrangements, the custodial mother spends 80% of the time with the children compared to only 20% with the father. In the book "The Divorce Culture", there is an interesting assessment which suggests that if there was a national index on committed fatherhood, the fatherhood index would be falling so fast that it would constitute the social equivalent of an economic crash.

Studies have found that 40% to 50% of children whose parents have divorced no longer see their fathers. The most frequent reason given for fathers fading from the children's

lives was the interference of the mother. In addition, access and visitation schedules are not always flexible enough to allow the children's relationships with their parents to continue to grow. Canadian research is not readily available but according to U.S. research, fatherless homes account for the following: 85% of all children that exhibit behavioral disorders; 80% of rape motivated by displaced anger; 71% of all high school dropouts; 70% of juveniles in state operated institutions; and 85% of all youths sitting in prisons. The magnitude of the statistics are very alarming and we should know whether not these levels of social problems are being contributed to by the existence of fatherless homes.

For a growing number of marriages, “until death do us part” really means “until the going gets tough”. While many will argue that the parents have benefited from divorce, very few would argue the same held true for the children. In fact, most studies have shown that the true victims of divorce are the children. The enormous consequences on children are such that divorce should be treated as a health issue. To a great extent, divorce is a form of child abuse. While divorce often improves the economic condition of men, who are rarely awarded custody, it nearly always results in the decline in the standard of living for the mother and the children. In Canada, the mother is awarded custody of the children in over 85% of the cases.

There is no question that the breakdown of the family poses a significant negative risk to the healthy outcomes of children. However, the problem does not stop there. After a divorce, a number of outcomes are possible. This depends on whether it was a simple, co-operative, mutually agreeable divorce or at the other end of the spectrum, a divorce from hell. The fact remains that most divorces do have a great deal of acrimony created, which research has shown can last for years. Divorce

by its nature is an emotionally charged situation. One need only consider the O.J. Simpson case to appreciate the problem of stalking, violence and domestic homicide that can occur after the breakdown of the family.

According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, in 1995, 17% of homicide victims in Canada were divorced or separated although they only represent 6% of the population. In addition, 12% of people committing homicide were separated or divorced and 23% of women killed in registered marriages were separated at the time of the incident. Studies have shown that women are particularly at risk during the first two months after separation.

In the February issue of the Canadian Medical Association Journal, it was reported that being a separated mother is hazardous to mental health. The research showed that these mothers suffered significantly more psychiatric problems and have a higher incidence of depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse than women in two parent families. Most of the women surveyed were free from mental health problems until they became lone-parents. The current mental health problems were found to be a function of the stress they were experiencing. The study also confirms that lone-parent mothers are likely to be poor yet it concludes that poverty is not the main reason for the mental state.

In the book "The Divorce Culture", the author, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead develops the concept of social and emotional capital. She asserts that strong durable family and social bonds generate certain goods and services such as money, mutual assistance, information, care-giving, protection and sponsorship. These bonds help to form a pool of social capital which can be drawn upon as needed. This social capital is generated from the relationship that one has

among the other members of the family tree. We have bonds, associations and relationships with uncles, aunts, grandparents and in laws, all of whom bring some support and sense of belonging and self esteem to the individual.

Her book concludes that divorce spends social capital and represents the death of a small civilization in that it severs the ties or the bonds with the other members of the family tree. The author concludes that children are the beneficiaries of our social and emotional capital. Since divorce consumes that capital, it therefore weakens the social fabric of our country.

When you consider the tragic consequences of divorce particularly in regard to children, it is a fair question to ask if the parents had looked at every possible option or assistance with their problem before they call it quits. That is the basic reason why I favour mandatory counselling prior to legal sanction of divorce. It provides a mandatory cooling-off period as well as an opportunity for education and counselling. No fault divorce, with no waiting period, where children are involved simply makes no sense.

In considering the issue of counselling, the question has to be asked whether it is ever too late to help. Marriage breakdown and divorce are complex, even if there are no children. There is a saying that for every complex problem there is a simple solution... and it's wrong! Complex problems require a multiplicity of approaches involving not only preventative, but curative or remedial approaches.

Preventative approaches are ideal but mitigating the impact after you have a problem is also important. This may be worthwhile considering in the cases of divorce because by adultery, substance abuse, financial problems or communication problems.

Research shows that 70% divorced persons remarry within 5 years of their divorce. One might therefore conclude that it is appropriate to introduce some form of counselling at the time of divorce to provide appropriate assistance to understand what happened and why. Counselling may also help to eliminate or mitigate the amount of hostility in breakups. In hostile breakups, the battles never end. A cooling off period is always appropriate and the need for co-operation cannot be overstated.

Mandatory divorce programs already exist in many U.S. states and in Alberta. In Edmonton, parents seeking a divorce must sit through a six hour course that describes the damage done to children by acrimonious custody battles. The "Parenting After Divorce Program" began as a voluntary course four years ago in Edmonton. For the past year, all Edmonton area couples battling over custody must take the program by a judge's order. The philosophy is that if we stop the fighting, the children will be better off.

After one year, it was found that very few people resisted the program and 90% rated the program as very helpful to them. The course was modelled after a similar program in Georgia and has led to hundreds of couples abandoning their plans for custody battle and reach a court agreement. The Edmonton course presents research about the ill effects that children can suffer and instructs parents on what to tell them about divorce. They encourage people to come together but recognize there are abusive relationships where this is not possible. It should also be noted that the Alberta Justice Department has indicated that the course may become a Province-wide requirement.

There are fourteen U.S. states that have similar programs including Georgia, Michigan, California and Connecticut.

Some of the early intervention programs report that as many as 5% of couples, that were contemplating divorce, found other ways to resolve their problems and have not proceeded with the divorce.

How to raise healthy and secure children of divorce is the most important aspect of a divorce counselling program. Some of the important messages are: protect the children from parental disputes; ensure the children are free to love both parents; parents have to change from being intimate partners to being parenting partners; children must have access to both parents without being placed in a loyalty conflict; and parents must recover from the trauma of divorce and get on with rebuilding their lives.

These are but a few of the issues included in divorce counselling programs. In Guelph, Ontario, an organization called Family Mediation Canada has compiled a list of over 140 courses for divorcing parents. Their research shows, as can be expected, that voluntary courses are available but the interest levels have not been very strong. Many have lost funding and others are sure to follow unless the benefits of such programs are communicated to the public. Despite the falling interest, exit interviews with participants confirm the helpfulness of these programs.

When you consider the enormous consequences involved when the family breaks down, there is no question that this issue should be a high priority. We must address the issue of a parenting plan for children and deal, if necessary, with the problem of post divorce acrimony, which is so prevalent. That is why I have recommended mandatory counselling prior to legal sanction of divorce in Canada in a Bill which was tabled in the Parliament in March, 1997. A copy of the Bill is in Appendix 5.

Counselling Is Worth It

Everyone seems to have ideas when it comes to talking about how we should address the issue of the breakdown of the family. Understanding that we must have a balance of preventative and remedial approaches, many people suggested to me that couples contemplating marriage should be required to take a pre-marriage preparation course. Many churches now have that requirement but legally it is not mandatory at this time. In reviewing samples of course materials that are presently in use, it appears to me that the most important aspect stressed in the programs is the need for open communications between the parties. Not only is it vital after marriage but it is equally important for the couple to talk about their views on virtually every aspect of married life and their values so that there are no surprises once the marriage is entered into. Courtesy of St. John of the Cross Church in Mississauga, Ontario, I have included in Appendix 6, extracts from their marriage preparation course which details the kinds of questions and issues that couples should contemplate.

Another initiative which is growing in popularity is referred to as marriage mentoring. Dr. Les and Dr. Leslie Parrott, of Seattle Washington, designed a program called “Mentoring Engaged and Newly Wed Couples” which involves a series of interactive workshops. Couples are matched with experienced married couples who talk openly about the ups and downs that they survived in their marriage letting the engaged or newly-wed couples learn from their mistakes and triumphs. The mentors rarely give advice but rather they rely on telling their own stories in order to teach. For the Parrotts “It's like opening a window on marriage”. Mentors are not on call for every little problem nor do they make a long-term commitment to the couple. They usually meet at 3, 7 and 12 months into the union helping the newly-weds to set goals,

while motivating and encouraging them to meet those goals. The success rate for the mentoring approach has been exceptional because it touches in a realistic way some of the issues that people find it very difficult to discuss. Here's some examples:

- Why do I sometimes still feel lonely?
- What if my partner's personality changes after we get married?
- We work at communication skills all the time but it doesn't seem to make any difference.
- What do we do when we just can't agree?
- How can we lighten up and bring more happiness to our marriage?
- What is the best way to express your anger?
- How can I be honest without hurting my partner's feelings?
- What can we do to protect our marriage from extramarital affairs?
- My sex drive is stronger than my spouse and I don't know how to deal with it?
- What do you do when one of us is a spender and one is a hoarder?
- How can we be more intimate as a married couple?

Half of today's newly-wed couples are horrified by their conflicts, and most have no one they can turn to for help. They don't want to go to their parents. Their peers don't have the answer either. But what about talking to a couple whose marriage has been seasoned and remains solid and joyful. That is the essence of the mentoring approach and it works.

Married life has to be nourished every day. Most marriages will face a crisis eventually and how it is handled will reflect on the strength of the relationship. Premarriage and mentoring programs provide a preventative approach which may help couples to cope when the going gets tough.

Learning how to deal with conflict is a very important part of a relationship. Too often, however, the couple's inability to cope leads straight to a breakdown without seeking help. Counselling or mentoring may help but the couple needs to recognize and acknowledge their problems immediately and not let the bitterness wear down the bonds between them. Once children enter into the picture, the challenges are more diverse and the risk of serious conflict does increase. However, resolving marital conflicts will make the relationship stronger and more resilient. There is no shame in seeking help when you need it, and the rewards for most families far outweigh the sacrifices.

Appendix 1

Low Income Cut-Off

Appendices 1 to 5 only appear in the printed book.

Appendix 2

Income Splitting For Spouses

Appendix 2 (continued)

Appendix 3

CPP Benefits For Caregivers

Appendix 4

Alcohol Health Warning Labels

Appendix 5

Mandatory Divorce Counselling

Appendix 5 (continued)

Appendix 6**Pre-Marriage Counselling**

COURTESY OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS CHURCH,
MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO

READINESS FOR MARRIAGE

- Why am I marrying you?
- In what areas are we most likely to have major differences of opinion?
- What do you perceive to be your role in our marriage?
- What are my expectations of our marriage?
- What are my fiancé's expectations of our marriage?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

- What do I like or dislike about myself?
- What are some of the specific qualities I want others to see in me? Why?
- What images do I project in order to be accepted by others? Do I let you see me as I really am, or only this image?

MARRIAGE TODAY

- When have I experienced:
Romance in our relationship?
Disillusionment in our relationship?
A time when my decision to love you led to experiencing joy?
- What lifestyle changes do I anticipate once we are married (time spent with friends, spending habits, hours at work, leisure activities, time spent with each of our families, raising children,...)? Will I be able to compromise on these issues, if necessary?
- At what times in our relationship do I find loving you difficult?
- List two ways you and your fiancée differ and describe each.
- List two ways you and your fiancée are alike and describe each.

DECISIONS IN MARRIAGE

- What decisions about my/your career might we have to make as a result of our marriage?
- Am I willing to compromise when we can not reach a mutual decision? How do I feel about compromising?
- What decisions have we made on having children? How did we arrive at this?

- How important is my faith to me? Have we discussed the differences, if any, in our religious practices? Have we decided how we as a couple plan to practice our faith(s)? What problems might I foresee?
- What was the last major decision we made as a couple? How do I feel about how the decision was made?

COMMUNICATION IN LOVE

- What things about myself, positive and negative, do I find hard to reveal to you (thoughts, feelings, actions, fantasies,...)
- In what areas have I found it a risk to share with you? Write on as many areas as you can in detail. Start with areas where you are least open, such as: fear of failure, responsibilities in marriage (children, sex, in-laws, religion, careers - yours/mine, drinking/drugs, the way you treat me, security, friends)
- Do I think you listen to me openly? Do I listen to you openly? Think of a specific example for each.
- Have I ever feared you would become violent or abusive?

DOLLARS AND SENSE

- How does money reflect my personal values? How important are material possessions to me?
- How has my past experience influenced how I view money (childhood, teen years, etc)?

- How do I measure my self worth -- is it in terms of who I am or what I have?
- Am I open with you in our discussions about finance?

FAMILY PLANNING

- Is having children important to me? If so, how many children, and when do I feel would be the best time to start a family?
- What have we decided regarding the method of planning our family? Am I satisfied with our decision?
- How would I feel if our chosen method fails and we are faced with an unplanned pregnancy?
- Am I open to reconsider these decisions later?

SEXUALITY IN MARRIAGE

- After hearing this talk, what questions about sex do I most want to talk to you about?
- What were some of the prominent sources of my information or education concerning sexuality (parents, friends, teachers, reading, entertainment, harmful childhood experiences in my home,...)?
- What are my attitudes now -- do I see sex as good/bad, fun/annoying, enjoyable/frightening, a necessary evil? If I do have negative feelings about sex, **why**?

- What qualities of yours do I find sexually attractive (sensitivity, tenderness, physical attractiveness, need for affection,...)?
- What sexual acts do I think are improper in marriage?
- Do I see procreation as a gift from God?
- How do I feel about our ability, or lack of it, to create new life?
- What have been some of the more romantic moments in our relationship, those times when I have felt very close to you? How have I expressed this?
- How can we deepen this aspect of our relationship through the years of our marriage?

THE WEDDING --- THE BEGINNING OF OUR SACRAMENT

- Am I satisfied with my relationship with God? How does this affect my relationship with you?
- What does being married in the Church mean to me right now?
- Do I see our Sacrament as a lifelong commitment of myself to you?
- Since matrimony is a daily Sacrament, how do we plan to live it out?

- Do I see our relationship, our Sacrament, as being important to the Church? To the community? How?

FAMILY ATTITUDES

Consider each of the following statements and answer yes or no for you and then put down the answer you think your fiancée will give. Then compare notes with each other. Your attitude and what your fiancée perceives it to be should be the source of useful discussion .

- In my family the message was, it is more important to belong to the family than to develop your own interests or to do your own thing.
- I believe that developing a sense of family belongingness is more important than developing your own individuality.
- In my family, it was common for friends to stop by unannounced.
- In our marriage I want our friends to feel welcome to stop by without an invitation.
- My parent(s) had their separate night out on a weekly basis.
- I believe that both husband and wife should have a separate weekly night for themselves.
- I sometimes saw my parent(s) jealous toward each other or someone else.

- I believe that husband and wife should talk to one another about areas that arouse jealousy in them.
- In my family it was a nightly ritual for the adults to have cocktails or beer before dinner.
- Once we are married one of our primary ways of relaxing in the evening will be they have a few drinks or beer.
- In my family I seldom saw my parent(s) drunk.
- During our dating time I have seen my fiancée drunk frequently.
- Household tasks, i.e. vacuuming, dusting, washing dishes, were shared by everyone in the family.
- In our marriage, we will each have agreed upon household duties.
- My family was usually on time for their appointments.
- If I have to be at an important meeting I usually start out early, just in case of a mishap.
- In my family the house was always kept in a neat and orderly fashion most of the time.
- In our marriage I intend to keep the house clean and neat most of the time.
- In my family, weekends were designed for everyone to do what they wanted, after their household duties were done.

- I believe that each partner should have one day out of the weekend to enjoy their favourite hobby, i.e. fishing, baseball, sewing, tennis, reading etc.
- In my family, both my parents worked outside the home, while I was growing up.
- For me it is very important that I can pursue my individual work career.
- My mother preferred to stay at home and raise the children rather than work.
- If the wife is offered a promotion in her job, which means a move out of town, the man should be willing to move with her.
- In my family, we showed affection to one another on a regular basis.
- I like to “smooch” a little in public with my fiancée.
- Vacations were a yearly event in my family.
- It is important for me to take a vacation out of town yearly.
- In my family, holidays such as Christmas, Easter, birthdays etc., were always celebrated with the whole family.
- After we are married I want to spend every other holiday with my family.

- I perceived that my mother and father were happy with one another in their day to day lives.
- Once we are married I expect that I will seldom be lonely again.
- My parent(s) stayed in close contact with their parent(s) through phone calls and visits.
- After we are married it is okay for my parents to call me every day.
- It was important in my family to practice good health rules and stay in shape.
- Once we are married I expect that we will gain too much weight and probably get out of good physical shape.
- In my family I saw my parents fight frequently.
- After we are married if I am fighting with my parent(s) I want my spouse to intercede for me.
- As far as I know my parent(s) were financially independent from their parents and did not borrow money from them.
- Once we are married the biggest adjustment for me will be not having as much freedom as before.

DOLLARS AND SENSE

- In my family it was the primary role of the male to provide for the material needs of the family.

- I believe that it is the primary role of the male to provide the material needs of the family
- It was important in my family to save for future emergencies.
- I feel that it is important to save for future emergencies.
- My family believed it important to pay the bills on time.
- It is important for me to pay bills on time.
- As children my family never shared financial realities with us.
- I believe we should let our children know our financial condition when they are capable of understanding it.
- Having the latest styles of clothing was high on my family's list of priorities.
- I want our family to have the latest fashions if at all possible.
- My family carefully budgeted for family vacations.
- Family vacations are more important to me than a new car (as long as the old one still runs).
- My family sometimes lived beyond their means.
- I will go into debt to buy a house, but for no other purchase.

- My family made donations to church and other charitable causes.
- I believe it is important for us to share some of what we have with the less fortunate.
- In my family a good-paying job, even with longer hours, was more important than time with the family.
- Time as a family is more important to me than a better paying job as long as we have enough to live on.
- My family became extremely anxious whenever they went into debt.
- As the thought that we too may need to borrow money makes me nervous.
- My family had a carefully worked out budget and followed it most of the time.
- It is important to me that together we work out a budget and both try to live within it.
- My parents kept 'money' secrets from each other.
- It is important to me that we both be honest regarding our use of money.
- My family was careful in its use of credit cards.
- I am responsible in the use of credit cards.
- In my family it is understood that we financially support and care for parents in their old age.

- I feel we should help our parents in their old age if at all possible.
- My family spent time shopping for bargains.
- I love to shop for a lower price.
- My family had clear goals of what possessions they wished to acquire.
- I have goals of where I'd like to be financially and what possessions I'd like to have ten years from now.
- My family tipped generously in restaurants.
- My typical restaurant tip is 15%.
- In my family we were taught to turn lights off when leaving a room.
- I feel that we should teach our children to save by turning off lights when not in use.
- My family had a tendency to become preoccupied with money and financial matters.
- I have a tendency to be unconcerned and even irresponsible about financial matters.
- My parents tended to fight a great deal over how to spend their money.
- I will probably argue with over how we spend our money.

Appendix 7

About The Author

Paul Szabo is the Member of Parliament for the Riding of Mississauga South. Mr. Szabo is a Chartered Accountant with an M.B.A. from York University and a B.Sc. from the University of Western Ontario. Prior to his election, he was employed in the corporate sector for twenty years followed by three years in his own chartered accounting practice.

Mr. Szabo also has a long record of community service including 9 years as a Director of the Mississauga Hospital, 5 years as a Director of Interim Place (shelter for abused women and children), and 5 years as a Director of the Peel Regional Housing Authority.

He was first elected to Parliament in 1993 and was re-elected for a second term in 1997. In the 35th Parliament, he introduced 16 Private Member Bills and Motions with specific emphasis on health, finance and family issues. One of his initiatives amended the criminal code to provide stiffer sentences for the abusers of women or children. He also developed a national education and awareness campaign on alcohol misuse called “Drink Smart Canada” and authored a book, “Divorce - The Bold Facts”, addressing the issue of family breakdown.

Paul and his wife Linda have been married for over 25 years and they have three children, Aaron, Reagan and Whitney.
