

Tilson would support probe of forced adoptions from the '60s

By Bill Rea

While it's not really a federal issue, Dufferin-Caledon MP David Tilson has said he would support the idea of a parliamentary committee looking into cases of forced adoption in the 1960s.

The Globe and Mail reported last Wednesday that several women were on hand for a meeting in Ottawa the previous day, giving accounts of how they were pressured into surrendering their babies about 50 years ago, at a time when a pregnant, unwed teen was deemed unfit to be a mother. This was in the days when abortion was illegal.

Tilson said the meeting was held away from Parliament Hill by a group called Origins Canada, made up of women who were forced to give up their babies in the post-war years.

He also said a spokesperson for Justice Minister Peter MacKay had stated that adopting is mainly a provincial issue.

"Those forced adoptions were indeed under provincial authority," Tilson observed.

He added fellow Conservative MP Harold Albrecht (Kitchener-Conestoga) had observed inquiries into things like this can be expensive. Both he and Tilson agreed it might be something worth having a parliamentary standing committee study.

He pointed out that while adoption is a provincial issue, there are a number of federal programs that are involved.

"I don't think it would be out of line for one of our standing committees to look into this topic," Tilson said.

The Globe story said support for such a study also came from representatives of the Liberals and New Democrats.

Tilson said governments over time have made some bad mistakes.

"Does this warrant an apology from the Prime Minister of Canada?" he asked. "I don't know."

He added provincial premiers of the day approved these abortions, not prime ministers.

"I think we have an obligation to listen," he added.

Tilson couldn't say why this issue has been raised now. He had heard about Tuesday's meeting and that MPs were invited.

"I went," he said.

The Globe story said the women at the meeting had said "the coercion was entrenched, and included social workers who obtained questionable consent and withheld information about government assistance, doctors and nurses who refused to let unwed women see their babies, and church-run maternity homes that sometimes predicated admission on a willingness to sign adoption papers."

Tilson said that was similar to what he recalled growing up.

"If you were pregnant and unmarried, it was a sin," he said.