

Supply

thinking that if we had worked together and collected all those dollars that were spent over the years and if we had all decided that the best thing we could do for Canadians was to sit down and do something about their economic situation, just imagine what we could have accomplished. We could have a national day care system. We would not have to fight about whether this is a provincial or a federal area of jurisdiction or priority. It would be wonderful if we could do that.

However, the fact is that we have provincial governments that have certain responsibilities which they are not prepared to relinquish. That is mine. Hands off. Even if what you want to do is very good, do not interfere. This causes problems, delays and a lot of frustration, especially for this minister, who realizes that these are very difficult issues.

When we consider what we could do if, first of all, we invested in our children, in children from infancy to 6 years of age, if we could intervene at that level, we would not have to build prisons, which we will have to do because we cannot afford the luxury of helping our children. We will do what we can. I would like to ask all those people who want the best for our children, for women and the future of our country, to get together and work on this and take the dollars we have to really do something good for Canadians.

Mrs. Maud Debien (Laval East, BQ): Madam Speaker, on March 8, we celebrated International Women's Day with all our sisters and colleagues around the world. Let me tell you that our day is no exception to those important days that we celebrate over an eight-day period.

I consider however that a single day is not enough to allow us to say that we have won the game. This day marks a time-out. It lets us have a moment's reflection before going on with the task at hand. On the last day of this octave, I am pleased to rise in this House to draw attention to the substantial and hard-fought gains made by women and set them in the perspective of future initiatives and representations, particularly with regard to Quebec women.

I also take this opportunity to salute all of Laval's women's organizations devoted to the well-being of their fellow citizens.

Let us never forget that the courage, determination and dedication that characterize earlier generations of women before cannot be overstated. These qualities have revolutionized the established order. In their quest for self-sufficiency, these women broke new ground so that their daughters could enjoy equal access to the right to vote, to higher education, the labour market, financial independence, political power and the corporate world.

• (1705)

These past few years have also seen a number of firsts: first woman in space, first woman Prime Minister of Canada, first woman leader of a Republic, first women Supreme Court justice, first women member of l'Académie française, and the list goes on.

In fact, the statement issued following the recent world summit on social development held in Copenhagen reiterated ten commitments, including that of promoting absolute respect for human dignity, ensuring fair and equal treatment of men and women, recognizing and reinforcing the participation and role of women in political, economic, social, cultural and everyday life as well as development.

Where are we now? Today, women collectively ask themselves: Where are we now? What is the result of our efforts? What will be at stake the next time? We all know, from personal experience, that some progress was made. But let us not fool ourselves.

In spite of these improvements, major inequalities continue to exist. In times of budget cuts and high unemployment, women and the poor may well end up paying the price. Some realities remain true: women still only earn 72 per cent of what men make, the majority of them are in low paying jobs without any security, daycare services are inadequate, elderly women are poorer than their male counterparts, and so on.

What is the situation in Quebec? Many Bloc members travelled across various regions of the province in recent weeks, along with the regional commissions on Quebec's future. As you know, the hearings held by the 18 Quebec commissions were a true success. Over 50,000 Quebecers participated in these very productive discussions, as part of the largest public consultation exercise ever held in Quebec. People from every age group and background came and told us what they expect from a sovereign Quebec.

Once again, Quebecers showed that they can listen to each other, understand each other and get along with each other. They came and told the Quebec government about their hope for a generous, united and responsible Quebec which will care about women, children, workers, seniors and young people. Many women's groups participated in the debate. I can tell you that their vision of Quebec's future is not that of the current federal government. Can the gap between the reality in Quebec and the way the federal government is perceiving it be that wide? The Secretary of State for the Status of Women and her Quebec colleagues in the Liberal Party of Canada have missed a first rate opportunity to get back in touch with Quebec's reality.

In any case, since Liberal members were absent, I will try to convey to them what Quebecers told us. First of all, as I mentioned before, women groups told us, as they did during the