

Government Orders

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the House today on something that is of very, very great concern to me. It is of very great concern to the government, as was noted in the proposals of *Shaping Canada's Future Together* where it says: "therefore the Government of Canada, in co-operation with all parties in the House of Commons, will explore ways and means to strengthen the representational and legislative capacities of individual members of Parliament".

Also it says it will do that so that we will move toward a less adversarial and less negative attitude, perception and/or reality in this House. It is an important part of the proposals put forward in this very important document.

I think all of us want to do it. Let us all get together in a collective, non-partisan and intelligent way to make this the right kind of place to show our constituents that we are doing the right kind of job for them.

Mrs. Shirley Maheu (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to respond to a couple of comments by the hon. member.

It is sad. I do not think he understands what the Canadian public is saying. I do not think the women of this country have phoned his office as much as they phoned ours after a comment like this.

The question of decorum in the House was introduced after a meeting between the status of women minister and the status of women critics about sexist comments and slurs against women.

No one was referring to a pack mentality. No one was referring to the fact that there is a negative situation. People are perturbed, upset, annoyed and alarmed when listening to sexist comments in this House. Pretty well every single member of Parliament today got up and talked about decorum.

How many of them talked purely about sexist comments? If we have to keep referring you back to saying you do not understand, please listen to what the women in this House are saying. Listen to what the women in Canada are saying or there is no use and no sense in discussing or passing this motion. We have to keep reminding you that what you are saying has nothing to do with the subject we should be discussing today.

I wonder if the citizens' forum and rally groups would have called it a charade. The forum said that we were acting like unruly children. What if it had heard the comments from certain members on the government side of this House? I do not believe it is just emotions that we get caught up in during Question Period.

I have another word for those two members of Parliament. It has nothing to do with being caught up in emotion, believe me. Most of the women in Canada feel the same way. I would just like to ask if you think that we are right as women in this House of Commons when we say that you have to learn to understand what we are talking about. We are not talking about partisan bickering. We are not talking about teasing one another across the hall. We are talking about a serious issue that concerns every single woman in this country. Could I have the member's comments?

Mr. James: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond because certainly I thought I was noting those grave concerns. I certainly did.

I have my notes here that I looked down at while talking. I talked about sexism and racism. I am very concerned about that. I have four women: three daughters and my wife. We have lots of chats about this. Certainly I have a lot of feeling for that sort of thing.

If you were on the street talking to somebody and they asked you a question, they would stay there, look you in the eye and wait for the response. This place does this sort of thing.

I really have a problem with that. Certainly what I was trying to say is that the kind of sexist remarks that were made are somehow caused. I am not trying to offer any excuses. A lot of things are said, some of them are not racist or sexist but there are other things said which are certainly not as serious. What could be more serious than that?

• (1410)

However they are agitating and tend to embroil us in casting aspersions back and forth. People probably say to themselves after they get home: "Why did I do that, why did I do that?" Hopefully you know that I have very serious concerns and I agree with you.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that I made my point clearly to the member earlier when I was talking about