

move, and I hope that the substance of the government's action lives up to its rhetoric. Certainly women today will not be satisfied with words alone but will insist upon action, action which meets their real needs.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Keeper: Very briefly I should like to say that the throne speech makes absolutely no mention whatsoever of the major social problems in the central areas of our cities. That is a very grave oversight. Also it says nothing with regard to the alleviation of the pressing problems of native people living in urban areas. That matter affects the quality of life of us all.

The speech made considerable reference to national unity. I would not want to deal with that matter in a partisan fashion, but I want to say a few general things about Canada because I think at this time it is important to remind ourselves that we can build a better Canada if we so choose. We need a country which is not torn by great gaps in wealth, either in terms of social gaps or geographic regions. Rather, we should have a country where the basic needs of all people and communities are met.

We must not have a country which is torn apart by cultural differences. Rather, we need a country which, while it stays together because of its common interests, acknowledges, appreciates, and celebrates its cultural variety, a country which rejoices in the full flowering of its people, a flowering which emerges from the freedom enjoyed by a people whose basic human needs are met. I am not only referring to the need for food, clothing, and shelter, but also to the need for security, the conditions for self-fulfilment such as education, recreation, and freedom of expression. Let us seek today to build a better Canada, a Canada that will stand the tests of time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Hon. Charles Lapointe (Minister of State (Small Businesses)): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in this first session of the Thirty-second Parliament, and I want to take this opportunity to extend to you and your colleagues in the Chair my most sincere congratulations and wish you well. I would also ask you kindly to convey to Madam Speaker, in addition to my most respectful regards, the expression of the great pleasure I as well as my colleagues in this House take in seeing her talent being put at the service of her colleagues in the House of Commons and to express also to her the great importance we attach to the fact that a woman who in recent years left her mark in the history of this country should now rank first among her peers in the House of Commons.

I also want to mention the excellent work done by the movers of the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, and I want to thank the hon. members for Rimouski (Mrs. Côté) and Sudbury (Mr. Frith) for the generous vision they gave us of Canada and also the positive tone and pace they gave this debate in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

The Address—Mr. C. Lapointe

As you know, Mr. Speaker, our country is going through one of the most critical periods in its history. Economically, we are faced with an extremely difficult situation where, on the one hand, we have to fight at the same time the unemployment that is affecting dramatically the poorer areas of this country and, on the other hand, to take difficult monetary and fiscal measures to overcome and fight inflation.

Politically, the situation is even darker, Mr. Speaker. The very future of Canada, our country, is being threatened by the separatist views of the Parti Québécois and its friends. The coming weeks will be decisive and the referendum scheduled for May 20 in Quebec concerns all Canadians from coast to coast and, above all, Quebecers. This will be for us, Mr. Speaker, a fundamental choice for our collective future. Will we choose to renew our faith in Canada, to reassert that we belong to Canada, that great country that offers so many opportunities and challenges, or instead, Mr. Speaker will we choose to live isolated within narrower boundaries, because we are afraid of those Canadian challenges and because the opportunities offered leave us gasping?

That is the choice we will have to make: that is the choice of existence we are confronted with by the booby-trapped question that is put to us by the Péquiste government, whether we want to admit it or not. At this point in time, Mr. Speaker, we must ask ourselves why Canada exists, what led our forebears, the Fathers of Confederation, to sit around a single table and ask: Why should we not pool our resources? Why should we not seek the compromises and means necessary to ensure the fulfilment, the flourishing of our two peoples?

● (2100)

Mr. Speaker, during the discussions which led to the development of the federal agreement between 1865 and 1867, two great principles were in the foreground. These principles are the most generous and the noblest to which any human being can and must adhere. Mr. Speaker, I am speaking about sharing and generosity. These two principles, along with the courage and the tenacity of the builders of this country have made of Canada a rich and free country where it is good to live. It was not an easy task to build such a large country. Our ancestors had to face many difficulties.

Even today everything is not perfect but we can still consider ourselves one of the luckiest nations on earth. The other question that we have to ask ourselves, Mr. Speaker, is what this federal agreement has given us in the last 113 years. Not only are we living in a country with one of the highest standards of living in the world, but even more important, we are living in a country where basic freedoms are truly respected, in a country where the concepts of sharing and generosity have evolved into one of the most advanced wealth redistribution and social legislation systems in the world and in a country where our rights as a French community are respected