

*Supply*

ments that have been in power since that time have done nothing, or almost nothing in this respect.

My colleague from Saint-Hubert asked a question of the Minister of Justice who will obviously avoid giving an answer. I would like to ask my colleague from Saint-Hubert if, in her opinion, the federal government demonstrates the will to achieve, within a reasonable time frame, equity in appointments to the bench.

**Mrs. Venne:** Mr. Speaker, the answer is a simple no. Unfortunately, since the Liberal government came into office in 1993, it has not demonstrated the will to appoint more women to the bench. We just have to look at the appointments that have been made.

On this subject, I would like to add that it is often said that if women are under-represented in the system, it is because they do not want to be elected to the House of Commons, they do not want to attend the conventions, they do not want to take part in the nomination process.

I would immediately say to that that the problem is not that women do not want to participate, but rather that they often do not want to be part of a system that was established by men for men. Women are not used to fighting with each other for a position. They are used to getting a position because of their skills.

When they go to a convention or a nomination meeting and see everybody bickering on the floor, they are very uncomfortable. That is why there are not too many women in politics.

I just wanted to add this observation to explain that it is often for that reason that, unfortunately, there are not more women in this House.

[English]

**Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew (Secretary of State (Training and Youth), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank opposition members for bringing forward this debate. I rise in the House today to express my deep pride in the government's record in promoting social justice and economic parity for the women of Canada.

I am encouraged by the interest shown by the hon. member of the opposition in the issues of women's economic equality, for what could be more important to Canada than the welfare of more than half its population. I believe it is 52 per cent. It is only when women and families thrive that our country will be renewed.

• (1050)

I welcome the invitation to demonstrate to my colleagues that the federal government can be counted on to keep its promises. We said we would and we are reshaping the country, making it economically strong, socially just and proud of the rich diversity of its people.

Our plan for Canada outlined in "Creating Opportunity" is firmly anchored in the principle that governing is about people. The motion before the House raises an important question: What has the track record of the government been on issues that affect the economic status of women? The short answer is that the government has done a great deal. The government made commitments in the last election campaign and is living up to them.

In the few minutes available to me today I want to discuss the actions we have taken in the important area of employment programs. I want to look briefly at the record in unemployment insurance and I want to talk about the child care issue. I will finish with some comments on the government's proposal for changes to the Employment Equity Act. The document is an empowering document not just for women but for the disabled, for aboriginals and for visible minorities.

First let me establish the context. It has become a truism that the best social program is a job. That point has been made by people from both the right and left of the political spectrum. Therefore well over 400,000 people can say that they have taken part in the greatest social program of all since the government took office in October 1993. There is every evidence that the record will continue strongly and that these are predominantly good jobs and full time work. Women are claiming their full share of the growth.

Let me give a personal view of what it is to be a woman and what it is to be a woman in an area that used to be exclusively male in the number of areas I have occupied in my career. I was in the civil service for many years before I entered politics. My experience was that I never had a problem working with men because those were the people to whom I had the most exposure in the levels I occupied in senior management. It gave me a great deal of opportunity to build human relationships that had a certain dynamic and express co-operation and a bit of a positive attitude about working with other people.

However the real experience I have as a woman comes from the fact that the most influential people in my life have been women. My grandmother was a medicine woman. She was an orator. She was the anchor in my family. She was the leader in my family. There are many strong men in my family. The women in my family are very strong women. They see the opportunity for greatness in almost every opportunity that comes their way.

Another most influential woman in my life has been my stepmother who adopted me when I was three months old. She took the opportunity to teach me good things. I cannot think of a thing women have gained that has just been given to them. I cannot see an empowerment process that women have not fought hard for. Women are truly the instrument of their own empowerment. We are 52 per cent of the population. If women use that