

*Supply*

I compliment my friend for going through a lengthy review with respect to all of the programs that her government has implemented in trying to correct this terrible situation.

• (1715)

Let me say at the outset to my colleague that I do believe that she and I and the members on her side of the House and the members on this side of the House are of one mind when we say we are all trying to come together to correct this terrible dilemma we find ourselves in today. Regardless of what we have seen happen in the last eight or nine years today there are more young people in our society looking for work than there ever have been in the history of our country.

I respect the statistics that were just read out, but one-third of all students in Canada who enter grade nine in our school system fail to graduate out of our high school system with any kind of a diploma or certificate of confidence and are known as drop-outs. I know that number, as my colleague has said, can be taken down or up, depending on how one looks at statistics. The fact is we have more drop-outs today in our school systems in this country than ever before in our history. Yet my friend realizes that Canada spends more of its gross domestic product on education than any other country in the world with the exception of one other country.

What are we failing to accomplish? The reality is we have failed in developing a national purpose. We know we have a constitutional problem because education is primarily the responsibility of all the provinces. Yet the federal government's responsibility is to take the lead in establishing national excellence and achievement goals for all our students, whether they live in Victoria, British Columbia or Newfoundland, to strive for and achieve.

I was on a board of education during the years this country faced that dilemma. Prime Minister Diefenbaker decided at that time we needed to provide some incentive to take away the stigma from vocational training. Students who did not have the academic excellence to go to university and get post-graduate degrees could devel-

op skills in vocational areas and qualify for those jobs where we need skilled workers so badly in Canada today.

What has this government done as a previous Conservative Prime Minister did in the late 1950s to promote this vocational achievement that I think is lacking within our country?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Tardif:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell my hon. colleague that, earlier in the debate, we discussed at length the initiatives taken by the government, including the centres for excellence and the Canada Scholarship Program, which was originally targeted at students graduating from colleges and which now provides scholarships to high school graduates who are entering the field of techniques of the future or faculties which will enable us to create jobs, thanks to the new technologies.

I believe that this government has recognized that it was extremely important to prepare the future and to try to direct young people in fields such as engineering and the new sciences.

• (1720)

This is one aspect. It is for young successful people. It is extremely important because this is where jobs will be created. As I was saying earlier, the fact that one-third of high school students drop out is very costly, first for those young people, in terms of salary in future years, and also for Canadian taxpayers, in terms of the support which they will have to provide to those who will not have gone to school long enough to get the better jobs. If we look at what is going on in our society, we find that there is a large number of available positions for which Canadians are not qualified.

We must first develop the knowledge and skills and the will to learn in our young people, so that they can get the jobs. We must urge our good students to persevere, and we must ensure, as adults and as a government, that we recognize the importance of succeeding and having this quest for excellence, which may guarantee that tomorrow we will all be better off in an economic activity which will enable Canadians to live even better, and which will provide a job for every one of them.