

Routine Proceedings

I am appealing here to Quebec women's common sense and administrative talents to get them to realize that savings are possible by eliminating overlap and duplication.

• (1550)

It is by taking control of their own destiny, by becoming self-sufficient that Quebecers, like Quebec, will grow from now on, in friendship with their Canadian sisters and without forgetting the progress that has already been made. There is, however, much more to be done in this area, and I think that the federal government should first deal with women's economic equality.

Women in the public service still earn only 70 per cent of what men make. Something must be done, and I urge the government to move from rhetoric to action.

It is said that women's economic independence is important and could reduce violence against them. I call on the government to take measures to ensure that women are paid as much as men for doing the same work. I urge the government to think about the action plan for gender equality.

The study the minister referred to earlier, the federal plan, puts women at the heart of government decision making. This plan requires that every policy, program and law be developed with the impacts on women, as well as men, in mind.

I exhort the government to be very vigilant regarding the reforms contemplated by the Minister of Human Resources Development, for example, cutting UI and old age pension benefits and setting women's benefits on the basis of family income. We know full well that benefits are often based on men's higher wages, and we fought against this.

What does this mean for a woman who receives her first old age pension cheque at 65 and whose husband earns a certain salary? It is often the first cheque these women have ever received. This cheque also represents economic independence, a little bit of economic independence for women.

[English]

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to rise in the House today to recognize and commemorate the Persons case from 1921, especially in the midst of great parliamentary diversity of opinion and focus as we speak today.

I would like to first congratulate all of the women today who received Governor General's awards: Marthe Asselin Vaillancourt, Dr. Mary Cohen, Ruth Flowers, Sheila Kingham, Carolyn Thomas, and Alice Taylor, who are all being recognized for their efforts toward making Canada a place in which all are treated equally. These women stand for everything that has gone right in Canadian history.

Look at the progress that has been made in Canadian society since 1929 when women received the right to vote. Today I refer and indeed also defer to those five Albertans, women all, who challenged successfully the convention of their day to bring the vote to women.

The secretary of state briefly mentioned the importance of family in society. This is a message that is sometimes forgotten or passed over when we are caught up in the singular focus of women's issues. As a party we affirm the value and dignity of the individual person and the importance of strengthening and protecting the family unit as essential to the well-being of individuals and society. Hopefully, this is a principle about which we may all agree, because once we have agreement we will have a fundamental basis from which to move forward.

We constantly hear comments and stories about women doing things differently and having different approaches to communicating. This is true, and perhaps more so for the women we recognize today as they receive the Governor General's award for their contributions to society.

Let us also look to history and in particular to Agnes Macphail and Nellie McClung, extraordinary women indeed. They broke ground for women today and they did it because they were focused, had strong convictions, and they also had a creative edge to bring their point home.

These women of the early suffrage movement had a sense of humour, were thoughtful in their world view, and for the most part could handle themselves well in difficult situations. For example, at a rally held in 1915 a heckler yelled at Nellie McClung: "The Prime Minister would quit politics if a woman were ever elected". Well, Nellie did not wilt. Instead, she replied: "This proves what a purifying effect a woman would have on politics".

• (1555)

McClung was no shrinking violet. She was fair minded, good humoured, and determined. These qualities typify Canadians and also my colleague from Yukon who was honoured by the House today.

We still need to work to guarantee equal opportunity for all. We may disagree on the quality of outcome, but whether we agree or not, when we as women engage in debate we must still struggle to relay our message.

McClung staged demonstrations to make her point in her time. In recent memory, one member of this House is said to have hiked up her skirts and jumped over a desk to make her point. Another member, this member, sat on the hood of a sports car to make hers. John Crosbie and the modern feminist movement are still shaking their heads.

Let us look at Agnes Macphail. When she first entered the House of Commons as Canada's first woman MP in 1921, a Commons employee tried to stop her at the door of the Chamber.