

*Status of Women*

the placement of women, handicapped groups and native groups in the public service. That "put down" of hon. members who say we have hired an affirmative action council is one thing, but do they want the program administered by people who are untrained? The hon. member also said that we are now doing a statistical study. Does he want us to make major changes in the public service without knowing what facts and information we are considering.

I would contrast that with the very callous attitude taken by the former President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Stevens) who started to slash the public service, that one area which provides perhaps the most important opportunity for women employment in this country. There was no consideration given to protecting the rights of women employees in the public service at that time. They got slashed and hacked like everybody else.

**An hon. Member:** That's rubbish.

**Mr. Axworthy:** Don't give me that stuff. Let us stand on the record.

I am saying we introduced the affirmative action program as a first stage in moving toward the private sector approach. Why did we do that? It was done because it was recommended by the advisory council that before we take initiatives in the private sector the federal government should provide affirmative action within its own public service. Again we responded to those recommendations and are following them through in a very careful and managerial way.

At the same time I have stated publicly many times that I intend to initiate a discussion before my colleagues in cabinet on the use of contract compliance in the private sector, because that is one of the most important means of reducing barriers and overcoming the limitations women face in the work force. I think hon. members opposite who are honest with themselves will admit I have said that in this House, have said it publicly and am committed to it. I have said to a number of women's forums across this country that I will fight for that issue because it is a critical component of any major strategy to bring about change for women and to bring about greater equality in the workplace.

Beyond that certain things were not mentioned. We introduced a program of affirmative action in our job-creation program. Again this was based upon recommendations made by the advisory council. They pointed out, and I think quite legitimately, that job-creation programs sponsored by the federal government did not include affirmative action principles. What did we do with the job-creation program which was cancelled by the Conservatives, with the result that there was no direct job creation? We introduced affirmative action principles which are now in place and working. I ask hon. members of this House to compare the records.

● (1640)

In addition, we introduced a major initiative with respect to the training of women for non-traditional work. The hon. member for New Westminster-Coquitlam produced some critical surveys of the ad campaign we introduced to encourage

employers and women to begin to move into non-traditional areas. She is welcome to her opinions, but they are not universally shared. We have received a number of congratulatory letters, which I will bring to this House. I will distribute their actual wording, because they do not talk about women moving into the work force on a temporary basis.

We are committed to providing the opportunity for women to move into non-traditional areas, and to back up that commitment we have introduced a training program which will provide 75 per cent of the cost of training women in those areas. That program has been taken up.

I draw the attention of hon. members to an article written in the Ottawa *Citizen* just after the Christmas break, telling of two young women in this city who had been going from temporary job to temporary job but who have now signed up for that program. I think one is a machinist, and the other is in some other form of skilled training. They said that this is the first chance they have had to get permanent new occupations. I am not saying that is enough, but I am committed to those goals.

I ask hon. members to remember what did not take place in the nine months of the previous administration. There were no training programs for non-traditional work. There was no affirmative action program. In exactly the same amount of time we have spent in office the previous administration produced none of those types of initiatives. If we are able to get our act together in nine months, why could hon. members opposite not get theirs together? Perhaps they could not because they were too busy making speeches about what they were going to do and not busy enough actually doing it.

I think it is important to deal with the issue of constitutional change because that is the focal point around which much of the controversy of the last four or five days has centred. Let us start with a different history than perhaps hon. members opposite are prepared to bring into this House.

From where did the original idea for a constitutional conference for women come? Did it come from Mrs. Anderson or the advisory council? No. I was the one who raised the issue with the advisory council.

**Mr. Nielsen:** On whose suggestion?

**Mr. Axworthy:** On my own. I raised the issue and asked Mrs. Anderson in a meeting whether the advisory council would be prepared to take on that responsibility. Why? I felt it was important and I felt that a charter of rights would be one of the most important steps forward for women in this country in decades. If hon. members want to ask what is important in terms of the role of women in Canada, we can point very clearly to our commitment to introduce non-discriminatory clauses and to provide guaranteed entrenched rights. Such entrenchments and guarantees have often been criticized by hon. members opposite. They say we should not be providing these and we should wait for the provinces to do it. That is the theory. The hon. member for Provencher (Mr. Epp) got up and said, "No, no, we are for a charter of rights," but he