

The Address—Miss McDougall

the provincial premiers to be examined next month at the next First Ministers' Conference.

[English]

My Government fully intends to tap and build on the economic strengths of women. In recent years we have seen a large number of women launch small businesses of their own. We are taking steps to encourage further and nurture the entrepreneurial spirit which has been shown not just by men but by the women of Canada. We intend to simplify regulations, improve procurement procedures and strengthen the Unsolicited Proposals Program for small countries and entrepreneurs.

I have spoken at some length about the measures we intend to take to address women's economic inequality. However, I want to stress that our commitment to women includes social justice, and that is equally firm. As the Speech from the Throne stated, we are dedicated to the pursuit of one goal, that of a modern, tolerant and caring nation in which its citizens are secure and prosperous. To this end we intend to bring before the House some important legislative initiatives to support and strengthen the institution of the Canadian family, among them the introduction of measures to end violent and degrading forms of pornography involving women and men, legislation to take effective action against child sexual abuse. We intend to address the problem of child prostitution and initiatives against the traffic in illicit drugs, which will help to improve the quality of life for Canadian families, for Canadian parents and, in particular, for Canadian young people.

[Translation]

Over the past several months, our Government has been working to develop a national strategy to completely wipe out the drug abuse problem in our society. As my colleague has already indicated, the problem of drugs, especially the illegal ones, has been aggravated by the existence of an international distribution network, contributing to a growing social crisis.

Our Government recognizes that this problem is not limited to the illegal drugs, but results also from the abuse of various chemical substances and medication. Unfortunately, this abuse problem is widespread and affects much too many Canadian men and women throughout this country. Accordingly, the Government will devote a lot of time and energy to solving this urgent problem. We will put the emphasis on public awareness and education generally and the rehabilitation of drug abuse victims.

[English]

A great many social justice issues affecting women require joint federal-provincial action. We have worked very hard to establish a good working relationship with the provinces. Federal, provincial and territorial working groups have been set up to facilitate joint action in the areas of child care and wife battering. We intend to continue and enhance these relationships to take effective action in other areas of mutual concern. One pressing area which I will be discussing with my provincial colleagues concerns the needs of immigrant and visible minority women. I am looking forward to taking part in

a national conference to be held in Winnipeg in November to address these concerns of immigrant and visible minority women which are special among the needs of women as a whole.

We also intend to work closely with the provinces to provide assistance to the victims of crime, and I firmly believe there must be a stronger sense of the special needs of women as victims of crime, as well as support for police programs to prevent crimes against women. Clearly, this will be a full and productive session of Parliament and, as Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I intend to ensure that women continue to make progress. I will do my utmost in that direction. I seek the support of all Hon. Members of the House in achieving that goal. After all, women make up half of our population. That is common knowledge. At the same time, our Government recognizes that half the talent in Canada, therefore, also rests with women. We as a Government, and as a country, intend to assemble this talent and provide opportunities for its meaningful expression in the home, the workplace and at all of the tables in our Government in dealing with our future because we know that as a country we need that talent. We need its creative expressions and we will be the poorer if we do not use it.

Mrs. Finestone: Mr. Speaker, I welcomed the words of our Minister as she expressed her concerns for women. I listened with a great deal of interest. I sincerely hope the agenda which she laid out will be realized, and the sooner the better.

If I may correct just one point, the Minister said that women make up 50 per cent, or half the population. It is a miniscule point, but we are 52 per cent. As a majority, therefore, I sometimes wonder if we have forgotten that we have a majority of talent which needs to be used in the most constructive way.

There were a number of issues my colleague referred to in the House. I am curious to know how she would respond to those particular issues. She talked about social justice, about a modern and tolerant nation, and a society which would be built with the best interests of this partnership in mind. I think that is a fine goal. However, if that is the Minister's goal, and I think it probably is, I would like to see some amendment of attitude and a different kind of attitude and thought with respect to issues which do impact upon women. For example, I would like to see the kind of mentality which would suggest that the deindexing of the Old Age Security would indicate a lack of appreciation of the fact that the majority of people over 65 years, and particularly those over 75 years, are women. The obscenity of our generation and our society is the poverty in which women live today, particularly older women. It is really key that this issue be addressed, especially in terms of the deindexation of the old age pension, which was tried and, fortunately, did not succeed, and in terms of the deindexation of the family allowance and the cut-back with respect to the child tax credit. The measures primarily affected middle-income families. They had a definite impact on that level of our society, and it is of great concern. The Minister talked