

Supply

Mrs. Bakopanos: Mr. Speaker, I am working for solidarity among all Canadians and, on this side of the House, we have shown that we encourage women to run for elections and get elected. Look at the number of women in the two opposition parties.

But I have a question to ask. We talk about solidarity with regard to legislation. The government recently introduced Bill C-64, an Act respecting employment equity. We asked for the support of the members opposite. I believe that this bill will give women new opportunities to achieve economic equality. Why did the other parties refuse us their support?

Mrs. Guay: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member is wrong. I could show her a bill that was exclusively for women. The bill she referred to is not legislation for women, it is very wide in scope. We will not support a bill just because the hon. member says so.

The bill we talked about dealt exclusively with protecting and helping women. So, when she talks about solidarity, I am sorry, but I beg to differ. She also mentioned her political party, where there is a fair number of women, a party that encouraged women. I can say that in the Bloc Québécois, we as women had to fight on the same terms as men and I am very proud of having been elected here, not because I was chosen by my leader, but because I fought and won in a nomination convention, like everybody else.

• (1325)

Hon. Roger Simmons (Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank my friend the hon. member for Québec for raising an issue that is both important and relevant. Her motion reads as follows:

That this House denounce the government for its insensitivity and its inaction regarding the adoption of concrete measures to promote the economic equality in federal areas of jurisdiction.

That assessment does not seem accurate to me.

[English]

The motion gives us an opportunity, I say to my friend from Frontenac, to discuss an important issue but the wording of the motion is a bit dishonest. To put it more bluntly, it is just not true. During the next few minutes let us examine the record, because it is not true. I am very proud to be here because I take real pride in the government's record in promoting social justice and economic parity for the women of this country.

I am encouraged that the member would put forward the motion on the issue of women's economic equality because what could be more important to Canada than the well-being of more than half its population? It is only when women and our families thrive that our country will be truly renewed.

The motion before us raises an important question. What has been the track record of this government on issues that affect the economic status of women? The short answer is that this government has done a great deal in a relatively short time. The government made commitments in the election campaign and the government is living up to those commitments. Before we get on to specific ways in which the government has honoured its commitment, let us look at the context for all of this.

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 the left of the political spectrum. Well over 400,000 people can say they have taken part in the greatest social program of all since this government took office in October 1993. There is evidence that record will continue strongly. These are predominantly good, full time jobs. Women are claiming their full share of this growth. At the same time, the government is aware that economic growth by itself is not enough.

Women still remain clustered in traditionally female occupations such as teaching and nursing, clerical, sales and service work. If all the government did was to rely on the market as some in this House would prefer to do, we would see only a glacial, painfully slow change in the labour situation as it relates to women.

This government can do better. We must do better to recognize as the government does the continuing need to help women move into new growth areas. It recognizes that its own programs and services can help bring us closer to that goal.

The federal side has a number of innovative projects aimed specifically at addressing the needs of women. Since it is the hon. member for the riding of Quebec whose motion we are discussing, let me talk briefly about a couple of projects for women that are under way in her own province of Quebec.

Since last October, Rimouski has been home to an entrepreneurial training project. Women of all ages with business creation projects have been receiving the skills they need to create successful small businesses. The project has focused on the needs of women without sources of income.

• (1330)

What is equally important is the team that has pulled this project together. The local Canada employment centre, the CEGEP de Rimouski and the group Ficelles, whose purpose is to ensure women's access to work, have all co-operated to make this dream a reality. It is consistent with our interest in encouraging self-employment as the way toward economic self-sufficiency.

In Montreal there have been a couple of projects. In one, women who are on unemployment have been receiving modern technological training and support to help them move back into