

The Address

Equally distressing are the conditions of poverty in which so many aboriginal children live. Is it any wonder that children fall asleep at school when they do not get one decent meal a day let alone three, when they live in rooms without heating, when they do not have proper winter clothing? I hope all members of Parliament, regardless of political ideology, will support the implementation of an aboriginal head start program so that we can end this national disgrace.

• (1550)

We cannot expect people to make a meaningful contribution to our society if we do not create the conditions that allow them to make that contribution. Surely it is the responsibility of Parliament to show forceful leadership in creating those conditions.

I cannot help but reflect upon some words spoken by the new Speaker of this House in 1981 when he said: "I want Canada to excel in spheres in which we are particularly gifted. I want us to produce goods better than anyone else. I want us to celebrate the forms of artistic expression that best reflect our soul. I want us to pioneer to branches of knowledge and to develop an even more humane social system".

It is wrong that one million children use food banks in Canada. That is why the Government of Canada will announce an action plan for major reform of the social security system in this country. It is wrong that senior citizens are afraid to walk down the street. That is why my government will bring in measures for community safety and crime prevention.

It is wrong that large numbers of women and children are battered and abused. That is why my government will introduce measures to combat that high level of violence. It is wrong that law-abiding citizens are victimized just because they look different, sound different or act different. That is why my government led by the right hon. Prime Minister will act to fight racism in hate crimes across this country.

The notion that every Canadian is entitled to certain basic standards of life is central to our identity as a nation. I am proud to live in a country where we take it for granted that we actually care about one another. I am proud to live in a country where universal health care is regarded as a right and not as some sort of specialized service for the wealthy of this country.

The decision of the Prime Minister to create and to chair the National Forum on Health is based on the belief of our party, the Liberal Party of Canada, that medicare is the cornerstone of social programs in this country.

Only when all Canadians have access to decent health care do all Canadians have an opportunity to forge a decent life for themselves and for their families.

As the minister responsible for housing, I am pleased to say that the government will immediately reinstate the residential rehabilitation assistance program. This was a commitment that we made in the election campaign and a commitment that was reaffirmed in the throne speech given just a few days ago.

Over the next two years, the Government of Canada will provide \$100 million in loans and grants to allow low income Canadians to bring their homes up to health and safety standards.

The emergency repair program will furnish assistance in rural and remote areas of Canada. RRAP for the disabled will allow Canadians with disabilities to make changes they need to their homes to guarantee their fuller participation in the mainstream of Canadian society.

I have asked the provinces and territories to share the cost and to deliver RRAP in a spirit of partnership and co-operation. It is my hope that we can create more jobs and provide more help to hundreds of thousands of Canadians across this land.

We are announcing this quick action in order to gain the immediate economic benefits that the renovation program will provide. Later this week I intend to propose improvements in the program to provincial and territorial housing ministers.

Our aim is to put Canadians back to work. Our aim is also to invest in short-term projects that provide the foundation for long-term economic growth. Our aim is to introduce policies and programs that allow all Canadians to benefit from that long-term economic growth.

The government's fundamental view is that we can only solve Canada's deficit problem when we are on track with creating long-term jobs. I am perfectly aware that money for any government programs comes from hard-earned taxpayers' dollars. As the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, I intend to respect that fact. I will do my best to eliminate waste within my departments as well as other governments. I look forward to receiving the suggestions of hon. members which I am sure will be made in a very constructive way.

• (1555)

Canadians are entitled to cost effectiveness and accountability for how their money is spent. We are moving toward greater fairness through open and electronic procurement systems. My officials and I will work with the provinces and others to establish an open purchasing policy across our respective governments.

What is equally important is to ensure that small and medium sized businesses have a fair opportunity to do business with the Government of Canada regardless of where they may come from.

On that note, a small business for instance in my riding has a difficult time knowing where to get the application forms or even who to call. Anyone who has ever flipped through a government phone book knows what a frustrating process this