

Supply

This will help us create a "one-stop shopping" operation; to eliminate confusion and improve access to the government; to improve research, communications and public information services; to strengthen links with local, regional and national women's groups, NGOs and universities; to ensure that funding for independent research is available; and to allow the federal government to focus its efforts toward promoting equality for women. These are tangible actions, not only words. This is a series of dynamic and realistic initiatives, which, put together, help Canadian women to progress towards social and economic equality.

Also, I want to mention that this government managed to take measures when it elected—or appointed, as the opposition would say—qualified women to positions in this House. I think significant progress was made when more women were elected to this House. This is one of many ways to ensure that women are on the road to economic and social equality.

[English]

Ms. Maria Minna (Beaches—Woodbine, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague for her well presented thoughts.

The commitment of the government to women as well as my commitment and that of my colleague is quite evident. Given that we are talking about women's economic equality, would it help and enhance women's economic equality much faster in all parts of Canada, including Quebec, if we were to get past and get over as quickly as possible this issue of separation which is in effect holding back the whole country economically, not just women?

Mrs. Bakopanos: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. Definitely. I spent 15 years working with Quebec politics and I see no progress for women if we constantly talk about separation, if we constantly talk about dissolving the country.

We have often said on this side of the House the worse way to advance the cause of women is by focusing on the issue of separation and not focusing on the issue at hand, assuring economic and social equality to women.

It is very unusual that members on the other side of the House talk about solidarity among women and yet they cannot talk about solidarity of all Canadians. We have to start by being united and have a united front to attack some of the problems that face women and men.

Women's issues are not simply women's issues. They are societal issues. We must work together in a united Canada to be able to ensure that women progress both socially and economically.

Mr. Ian McClelland (Edmonton Southwest, Ref.): Madam Speaker, I was intrigued by earlier comments of members concerning the recent report of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. It seemed to suggest there was a gender bias of some description in lending.

With some experience in the CFIB mode of surveying, I wonder if this is correct or if this is a reflection of the people who responded.

• (1645)

I would like to put some interesting information on the record. It is from a Statistics Canada national survey on the financing of small business, dated November 1994. Statistics Canada found that 18 per cent of small businesses owned by men who had sought financing had been refused. For women the figure was 24 per cent.

StatsCan noticed that this difference may reflect an industry preference rather than sex discrimination by the lenders. An example that suggested this industry preference is the business and personal services industry which is the largest share of businesses owned by women. In fact, if there was a bias it had more to do with the kinds of business women determined they were going to try to open. It was not a gender bias.

The other was the question of whether or not there was a bias based on interest rates. Research has shown there is not a gender bias. It is strictly based on the credit worthiness of the business.

Mrs. Bakopanos: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased about this question. At least we can stick to the facts about how far women have come in terms of economic equality.

I want to bring to the attention of the member that Pierrette Leroux, who is the executive vice-president of the CFIB, said there is no doubt that women are penalized by banks and financial institutions. In fact, she called it financial sexism.

As this government has said, unless we can take care of our financial house, no one will be able to benefit from the resources we have, including women. When we talk about interest rates, we have proven by the budget we put forward, and the whole economic community agrees with us, that Canada is on the right track. Once we continue with the initiatives we have set forth in the budget, then hopefully we will move even closer to economic equality for women and all Canadians.

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to reaffirm the position of this government. We are here to ensure that all Canadians,