

In my capacity as member of Parliament, I would like to draw attention to the fine job done by several organizations in my riding, non-governmental organizations of course, who work with women. I have already done so at a brunch to which I invited them on Friday to mark progress toward equality.

In light of the theme for the next world conference on women for equality—there certainly was some discussion on the subject—I would like to congratulate them again, as I did on Monday.

Last week, on International Women's Day, the Prime Minister summed up quite eloquently the role and contribution of Canadian women. I think it is important that all members of this House, both men and women, know what he said in essence.

• (1635)

"Today, said the Prime Minister, more women work in a broader variety of areas in which they have more influence on the decision-making process than at any other time in our history. And we have every reason to be thrilled about this. As we approach full gender equality, we are strengthening our society and opening new horizons for all Canadians. In Canada, women are making progress toward economic equality. Relying on their own means and abilities, women help shape the future of this country." Not only that of one province, I might add. "As for the Canadian government, it is meeting the challenge. Women's equality is not a matter of special interests or rights, but rather a matter of social and economic justice, a matter of good government".

This message is an inspiration to each and every one of us. It sets the role and contribution of Canadian women in the right perspective.

It is undeniable that we have made progress, by dint of hard work and often courage. But this progress does not benefit only women. It benefits the whole of our society.

[English]

This is because women's issues are everyone's issues. They are societal issues. They touch every single citizen.

We need to leave behind the cliché battle of the sexes where women's gains are interpreted as men's losses. We have to accept that when women advance toward equality everyone benefits. It is purely mathematical. When women, who make up 52 per cent of the population, are able to make a full contribution to society, 100 per cent of the population benefits.

[Translation]

What surprises me is the motion tabled this morning by the Bloc Québécois member. The hon. member obviously does not realize that the best way to help women is first to be a good government.

She should know that by creating 433,000 jobs in one year, the Canadian government makes a concrete contribution to women's economic equality. The member should also know that

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by putting our fiscal house in order, we protect our prosperity, our social programs and our quality of life, something which equally benefits Canadian women and men.

[English]

The motion we are debating today talks about concrete action. Here are some examples of specific actions taken by this government. The job training and illiteracy programs provide women with some of the tools for greater economic independence. By combining these tools with job creation the government can help women access a full range of choices in their lives.

Our initiatives for small business, including improved access to capital, will help women entrepreneurs and create a climate more conducive to the creation of jobs for both women and men.

The Employment Equity Act improves the employment opportunities for women. Youth Service Canada, a new strategic measure, helps to put out of school and unemployed young people of both sexes back to work. The infrastructure program has funded projects such as the rehabilitation of a children's centre, the construction of community health centres, libraries, municipal day care centres and shelters. All of these are very concrete initiatives to help women achieve economic equality.

[Translation]

To be a good government also means adjusting our structures to make them simpler and more efficient.

This is why my colleague, the Secretary of State for the Status of Women, announced earlier this week the merging of three organizations dedicated to promoting women's equality.

As part of its program review process, the government examined the role of Status of Women Canada, of the Equal Opportunities for Women Program at the Department of Human Resources Development, and of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

It became clear that these three structures promote women's equality and, to various degrees, conduct research and work in close co-operation with women's groups.

Consequently, the government concluded that the best way to improve efficiency was to consolidate its initiatives to promote women's equality under the structure of Status of Women Canada.

This means that the Equal Opportunities for Women Program will be transferred to Status of Women Canada.

• (1640)

As well, the research, communication and public information functions of the advisory council will become part of the routine operations of Status of Women Canada. This transfer will enable us to better manage the human and financial resources involved, eliminate duplication, and put an end to political appointments. These are all measures which the Bloc Québécois keep asking us to take as a government.