

that has changed, the organization of society that has changed or the role and place of women in society that has changed.

We can look at the House and at the number of women who have been able to win "gagner leurs épauettes au niveau politique, elles siègent ici".

**An hon. member:** On their own initiative.

**Mrs. Finestone:** Not on their own initiative, I say to my colleague across the floor. From a lot of work by women like me and plenty of others.

The Liberal Party has brought into force a Human Rights Act, a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and a royal commission on economic equality, all structures of society that express our will to ensure equality for women and that give us the legislative mandate and the tools we need that were not in place when the Royal Commission on the Status of Women first held its hearings.

I appeared before the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. I appeared about child care. I appeared about latchkey children. I appeared on the role of the volunteer in society, the needs of the volunteer and the need for recognition for unpaid work. The women here today gained many opportunities right back to the Lavalee case and right through the history of the development of equality and opportunity for women.

The women who think today that there is nothing we need to be concerned about, that violence against women is not a reality, that it is not something society should deal with, and that the Minister of Justice who has been doing a fine job addressing many of the issues should not be doing it, have missed the point that 52 per cent of the population require attention. All those issues in society need to be addressed.

I thought it would be worthwhile to address some of the points raised in my absence this morning. I was attending other duties and could not get back to the House on time. I gathered from what colleagues in the Reform Party said concerning women's equality and the consolidation of the federal government's organizations for women that they accused the government of not taking enough action on equality. They referred to us as a special interest group. They talked about us as a particular bunch in society.

Quite frankly this bunch in society, this gender called women, females, wives, mothers and grandmothers, happen to make up 52 per cent of the population. They are not a special interest group. The gun lobby is a special interest group. The banking institutions are a special interest group. Certainly women are not a special interest group. They are an integral part of society. Their concerns need to be addressed through research, through public meetings, and through advancing their concerns on the floor of the House.

### *Supply*

Members of the House should make sure they consult their ridings to find out the concerns of women, their husbands and children. They might be more reflective of real society and stop worrying about the peculiarities of a just society from their perspective which seems to want to throw everybody in jail and throw away the key.

They have called for the government to get out of child care, that women should stay at home and look after children. If all women in the workforce stayed at home over 20 per cent more of the population would be living under the poverty line.

They do not recognize that women go to work not only because they like to and not only because they have confidence and want to but because they need to in order to keep their families above the poverty line. I do not expect the Reform Party to understand that.

• (1540)

They also talked about the question of the lack of need for any special action. There is plenty of need for special action so that the women of the country will be ensured of special action.

*[Translation]*

I would now like to talk about the project to merge these institutions, a project I have just tabled, and the action the government has undertaken with respect to the three groups serving the interests of women, because I think it a bit unfortunate that this was not well understood. Perhaps the opposition party, the Bloc, did not have an opportunity to carefully read the document I tabled and the time perhaps to read what I said in the House. In this regard, I would like to draw their attention to certain facts.

Through in-depth research undertaken by this government to ensure that it gives careful attention to fiscal matters—and, with all sorts of new things in our society, and with the need to be careful with the deficit as well, we must manage our society very carefully—as part of my mandate with respect to the status of women, I looked at the three major institutions, government institutions. This has nothing to do with the private sector and the organizations in the private sector, which have their own sets of problems. That is another issue. It was not the issue I dealt with; I tried to ensure that they operated better and in a way that would see to their interests from the grass roots right up to Cabinet and from Cabinet back down with the information required.

It was discovered that everything was in triplicate. We had three separate administrations and three levels of duplication, and I took those steps to streamline all these resources, to concentrate our efforts and to reinforce our capacity to achieve equality.

By merging the three groups, we will eliminate confusion and facilitate access to government. This initiative will also provide a more direct link with women organizations at the local, regional and national levels as well as with non-governmental organizations and universities. What is more important is that I get to keep the \$700,000 so that—yes, the Bloc member is