

The Address—Mrs. Blouin

Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention to the House a subject which understandably is of a particular concern to me, the status of women.

When they come to Parliament, women of course are entering a place that has been largely permeated with exclusively masculine values. But today, they help change the rules of the game. Men and women understand that diversity is a source of enrichment for Parliament and a sure factor of true democracy.

This Government has shown how serious its commitments were with respect to the economic and social development of women. The labour market now includes 347,000 more women than in September 1984, while the unemployment rate has declined by 2.4 points.

Let me stress here, Mr. Speaker, some achievements directly linked with the subject at hand. Better job and training opportunities; employment equity in jobs under federal jurisdiction; a new divorce act; improved pensions for women; increase in women appointments, and the forthcoming publication, next November, of the report on child care by a parliamentary task force.

Over the past two years, Mr. Speaker, the status of women has greatly improved, but much remains to be done. Aware of their difficulties, concerns and rights, I will watch very closely how the issues of particular interest to them will progress.

We must assume a great social responsibility towards the emergence of the various social realities among women. Mr. Speaker, we will pursue with determination the objectives which we have set up in order to guarantee women a decent future.

I was delighted to read in the Speech of the Throne, that the Government intends to intensify its fight against the harmful effects of pornography, a major factor which contributes to violence against women and children.

When a free society wishes to assess itself, it is brought naturally to wonder how its citizens should behave and what limits there should be to their free expression. There are no easy answers to these two questions, but only in trying to delineate the elements of a possible answer can we possibly define our freedoms and responsibilities.

Again, Mr. Speaker, our Government has a major role to play. With the assistance of the various people concerned, it is necessary, even imperative, to convince Canadians to tackle the roots of this problem and to remedy the situation.

The same applies to violence against women; even though it is not new, this problem concerns all of us and its solution depends upon our collective efforts. It is a complex issue which necessitates co-operation and understanding in the steps to come. But we simply cannot afford to wait much longer to find solutions to this problem which, in a modern society such as ours, is troubling, not to say embarrassing.

Since our election, Mr. Speaker, we spared no time and energy to improve the condition of our young people. Our efforts have been rewarded and we have made remarkable progress in the past two years. From 18.4 per cent on election

day, the youth unemployment rate has now dropped to 15 per cent. The number of jobs for young people has increased considerably during the same period. Lastly, the programs launched by this Government to promote student employment have led to a sharp increase in the number of summer jobs for students.

Much remains to be done, Mr. Speaker, and this is why the Speech from the Throne advocates better opportunities for young Canadian men and women. As indicated in the Speech from the Throne, the Government is firmly resolved to pave the way for closer co-operation between the federal administration, the provinces and the private sector to improve employment opportunities for young people so they will take a more active part in productive and challenging endeavours.

The Speech from the Throne also highlights our commitment to promote small business and private initiative, especially through new projects designed to instill a genuine spirit of entrepreneurship in young Canadians.

The quality of post-secondary education also ranks high on the agenda of the Government. To help meet the challenges facing higher education, the Government will propose a national forum on post-secondary education, to be held early next year.

During the first session our Government introduced Bill C-18 which was given third reading by the House. Since this Criminal Code amendment became law, there has been a sharp decline in cases of impaired driving which, as we know, is the main cause of highway accidents. Penalties are much stiffer and many drivers think twice before getting behind the wheel. The 1985 Christmas highway toll was the lowest in many years.

In the Speech from the Throne, Mr. Speaker, the Government is again committed to support the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. The Government has indicated its firm intention to implement strong measures against the serious threat of widespread trafficking in hard drugs. To prevent drug and alcohol abuse, the Government will propose a national strategy to fight against drugs, and a comprehensive action program to reduce impaired driving. The Government will continue to campaign in Canada and elsewhere to put a stop to the use of drugs by amateur athletes.

On the international level, the major supplier countries keep producing large quantities of drugs. On the national level, there is no indication that drugs are less available. The overall value of drugs seized by Customs Canada exceeds \$244 million, a 142 per cent increase over the estimated value for 1984. Total drug seizures made by Customs Canada increased 10 per cent over the previous year.

It must be noted that drug seizures by Canadian Customs over the first six months of 1986 are higher than those recorded during the whole of 1985. At the end of June 1986, the value of drug seizures totalled \$334.6 million, some \$100 million more than the total for 1985. The report on drug