

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, the parliamentary task forces, of course, were announced in the other place.

● (1420)

Senator Roblin: That is true enough.

Senator Perrault: Of course, I had no role in determining the membership of those task forces established in the other place, but I have a belief that, if certain parliamentary task forces of importance to Canadians are formed, and in view of the fact that Parliament is comprised of two chambers, those task forces should include members of the Commons and members of the Senate. For example, I know that the honourable senator, with her outstanding background in public affairs in western Canada, would be prepared to serve as a member of any such joint task force formed in Parliament.

With respect to the immediate task forces which have been announced, it is certainly the hope of certain members of the Senate that at least some members of the Senate will be part of those task forces.

Senator Bielish: I have a supplementary question. Does the Leader of the Government not agree that since so many women are attempting, for economic reasons, to return to work, it might have been appropriate for at least the task force on employment opportunities for the eighties to be headed up by a woman? Incidentally, I am perfectly aware that the press release did state that all leaders of both houses were consulted and made aware of all that happened.

Senator Perrault: I understand the honourable senator's concern, and, of course, ability should be the sole criterion when chairmen and members of task forces are appointed or when appointments are made to government bodies and agencies. It must be said, however, that the Right Honourable the Prime Minister is deeply committed to the concept of equality in this country, and not only with respect to males and females; he is deeply committed to the concept of equality with respect to those of different ethnic background and heritage.

There has been a dramatic improvement in the status of women while the Right Honourable the Prime Minister has been leader of the affairs of this nation.

Senator Bielish: I have a further supplementary. I am not surprised that all chairpersons are from the government party. Could the Leader of the Government tell me if any of the women who sit in Parliament on the government side were considered as possible chairpersons for one or more of these task forces? If so, were they found wanting? If not, why were they not considered?

Senator Perrault: May I suggest, with all due deference to the honourable senator, that the line of questioning is, in my view, out of order.

Some Hon. Senators: Oh, oh!

Senator Perrault: The line of questioning relates to decisions taken in the other place. The information sought is not within the purview of members of this place.

[Senator Bielish.]

Senator Smith (Colchester): Of members of the government, surely.

Senator Perrault: I want to assure honourable senators that, insofar as it is within the power of the government in this place, every effort is made to see to it that members of both sexes are given major responsibility. We have serving us today as Acting Speaker one of the distinguished parliamentarians in Canada, the former Speaker, the Honourable Renaude Lapointe, who served for a number of years with great distinction as Speaker of the Senate.

In the other place the Right Honourable the Prime Minister has indicated the great importance of acknowledging ability regardless of sex by appointing another outstanding woman, the Honourable Jeanne Sauvé, as Speaker of the House of Commons. She is the first woman Speaker in the history of the House of Commons. During the years in which there were Conservative governments, action of this kind was never taken.

● (1425)

Senator Flynn: How many years?

Senator Perrault: The chairman of the government caucus is a distinguished and able woman, namely, Senator Neiman, and we are proud of that fact. There are many other examples.

Senator Bielish: My question pertains to the six parliamentary task forces and not to any other appointment.

Senator Perrault: The honourable senator's views will be noted carefully by all those who serve here in Parliament.

Hon. Duff Roblin (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I should like to ask a supplementary question. Did I understand correctly, from the words of the Leader of the Government, that it was the intention to make these study committees joint committees of the Commons and the Senate?

Senator Perrault: Honourable senators, I believe that there are certain committees and task forces which should be made up of representation from both chambers. The membership of committees must, of course, be drawn up on the basis of the subject to be studied and the matters under consideration. I am sure the honourable senator will agree with me that the expertise that resides in this chamber is such that it should be made available in the interests of the Canadian people when committees of Parliament are formed.

A number of representations have been made to me by many senators to the effect that they would like to see a greater degree of participation in certain parliamentary task forces and committees. I would certainly be interested in the views of the official opposition on this subject.

Senator Roblin: My honourable friend did not answer my question as to whether or not there would be joint committees. I suppose we can regard that as par for the course, because one of his skills is in avoiding the question. I have to admit that, as a former "question answerer" myself, it is not a bad idea sometimes.