

*The Address*

What people do see through television is mostly Question Period. They see high emotional debate. They see strong language. They see outrage and indignation. They see behaviour that sometimes we must acknowledge we are not proud of. What they do not see with enough frequency is calm deliberation, discussion of issues in a serious way, serious issues with serious solutions, respect for each other's points of view even when we differ, and final decision. When they see us vote, they see us vote as blocs. They see us stand up as a bloc either for or against and they wonder about the individual they elected to represent them.

There are other factors which contribute to the disrespect or the anger people have for this institution. I have to acknowledge part of it is the tough agenda and the tough medicine. This government has introduced and passed legislation which was not popular, very definitely not popular. We did so with the firm belief it was required, it was needed, and did it recognizing that we would have to account for it. In the process, people have felt that we were not acting according to their wishes.

It is ironic, 70 per cent to 75 per cent of Canadians say they want their elected officials to follow their wishes, but about 75 per cent say they want their elected leaders to take strong decisions and do the right thing, even if it is not popular. They want strong leadership but they do not want their views ignored.

Of course, they also see us involved in highly partisan, highly fractious debate. They see, too often, members standing up accusing the other side of malfeasance, of corruption, of ignorance, of stupidity, of irresponsibility, all of those things. The blame is not on one side or the other. I am not trying to assess blame. They see us all doing that.

• (1620 )

Sometimes the temptation to do that is overwhelming. It is irresistible. It is emotion. We do feel strongly about these things. Yes, when you stand up and take these dramatic emotional stands, your chances of getting reported or appearing on television is increased. These things are, in a sense, understandable, but they bring us into disrepute.

There is also concern in parts of the country, particularly my part of the country, the west, that they are not

being adequately represented. Too often they see groups standing up as a party group and voting on a particular issue which does not make sense to them. It does not affect them. They do not understand it.

They do not understand why those of us from western Canada are not standing up and saying: "Well, we do not like this because people in the west do not like it." They do not understand why we vote as a party bloc all the time and do not show more divergences in reflection of the divergences that exist in this country.

They sometimes accuse us of being Ottawa's representatives to the constituency as opposed to the constituencies' representative in Ottawa. They get angry about that.

They believe that the system does not provide enough opportunity for listening, consulting and taking their views into consideration. All of these things have contributed to the general disrepute in which we are held.

Much of the focus of the public debate is on the question of free votes. They say: "We should have more free votes. People should be free of party discipline. We should change the roles of members of Parliament so they can vote as their constituents want."

They suggest that we should eliminate the element of confidence from the questions when you are dealing with legislation. They should not be questions of confidence ever. The element of confidence should arise when they are clearly spelled out as being questions of confidence, thereby freeing members to vote according to their constituents.

I will deal with that in a moment. First, I think we have to remind ourselves of just what reforms we have made, because the House is a dramatically different place than when I first arrived here.

There is the old expression: "Everybody knows that power corrupts." I think it is equally valid to say that powerlessness corrupts. If you do not have power or the ability to have an impact on things, that is corrupting in itself.

It causes you to do extreme things. It causes you, outside these institutions, to involve yourself in civil disobedience and to take extreme action, if you feel you are powerless to change things.