

*Government Orders*

difficult thing to do in this day and age when the world is seized with wars.

• (1145)

We have mass media with pervasive influence that shows violence and there is desensitization about the effect of it. We have an onerous task not just to make laws but to make it a state of mind. We have a commitment to deal with it in a very human way. It is not just an issue on one day of the year; it is a state of mind. It is the way we live. It is the way we relate to each other. It is the state of mind with which we approach the work we do as lawmakers, as legislators.

Recently I was unable to attend a conference in Vancouver and one of my female colleagues from the area replaced me as there were things that needed to be said that I felt very strongly about. These are some of the things that were said: "Our voices need to be added to the urgent debate about the challenges facing Canada's families. Violence is not an issue of one person or of one gender. It is an issue of humanity and it is an issue of all peoples".

I am especially pleased to speak to the vision of Canadian families living violence free. I am proud to be a member of a team that dares to dream, one that has faith in our capacity as individuals and as a nation. Our dream for the country was clearly described in our document "Creating Opportunity". It is based on the belief that each of us can be part of the solution.

I am particularly proud of my colleagues, the Minister of Justice and the Secretary of State for the Status of Women. It is not easy to seize particular issues that would help free society of those who would perpetrate violent acts and those who would take the opportunity not to do good. To roll that into a legislative agenda, to roll that into something that is accessible, fair and universal in approach, is very difficult.

I look at the different attempts by the minister to change the Criminal Code and to deal with a number of very contentious issues, controversial issues, such as gun control legislation. A very difficult agenda is set for these individuals. I appreciate the work they have done.

We are committed to changing the future and recreating Canada in a way that works better for all of us. We believe we can build a better country through stronger children and stronger families. People tend to focus on one issue or one aspect. Segmentation or compartmentalization of issues makes it easier, more manageable, but is not realistic.

We cannot separate the child and say the child is unaffected. We cannot say the spouse, the family, the grandmother or the community is unaffected when there is violence in a family or in a community. It does not work that way. It is pervasive. The power of things that go wrong, the negative things, is very

influential on people, many of whom are young children in their formative years.

We are committed. Our vision stems from the simple but profound philosophy that everyone has the right to safe homes, safe streets, and a life free of violence. No one deserves to be abused physically, sexually, emotionally or financially. No one has the right to control another person by threat, coercion, physical intimidation or any other abuse of power and control. Child abuse and neglect, child sexual abuse, wife assault, spousal assault, other forms of violence against women and other people, and the mistreatment of seniors and persons with disabilities are serious abuses of power within families and relationships of trust and dependency with detrimental consequences for all of us. They shame us as individuals and as a society. Those are the people who depend on us the most. They have greater need and less capacity to care for themselves. They are the disabled, children and seniors. Those people do not deserve to be mistreated. They do not deserve to be treated with anything but kindness and generosity.

• (1150)

The costs of violence and personal suffering, social breakdown and direct government expenditure are incalculable. The hundreds of millions of dollars in social spending do not begin to pay the price of broken spirits and damaged lives, in some cases irretrievably damaged. Sometimes it starts a cycle that continues from one generation to another. It takes an enormous amount of effort to break that cycle or the silence. To correct those wrongs costs a lot more money and takes a lot more effort than if we are proactive and able to take preventive measures. We are paid back enormously for taking those steps.

The complexity of family violence requires a long term, co-ordinated approach to address the root causes. We must eradicate the conditions that contribute to family violence and provide the proper environment for young people to escape the vicious cycle associated with abuse.

Only when each and every Canadian lives without fear can we say we live in a violence free society. An important part of the solution is to influence the conditions of socioeconomic inequality that reduce vulnerability to family violence. It is not an excuse; it is a condition. Violence is inexcusable but there are mitigating factors. There are things beyond control, beyond the emotional, financial and social capacities of individuals who fall victim to becoming perpetrators.

We need to address sexism, ageism, ableism, racism and other isms. We need to assure adequate access for all to appropriate services before we can hope to make Canada a safer place. The federal government recognizes the need to treat these issues as fundamental social problems with widespread ramifications for our families, indeed our entire society.