

*Routine Proceedings*

more than double. Given their key role, I think it is time society recognized their worth. We must pursue a fair distribution of unpaid work in the home where women still carry a disproportionate burden of work.

We must persuade industries to develop family friendly workplaces to help root out sexual harassment and discriminatory practices. We must urge banks in particular and the financial community in general to recognize the achievements of women entrepreneurs and give them the fair and equitable consideration and support they deserve.

• (1235)

Women do not want a free ride. They want their fair share. I think that has become fairly obvious. Governments must continue to have a role in the drive for women's equality, even in the face of restrictive fiscal constraints.

Violence against women, sexual harassment, inequalities and inequities in employment opportunities, the wage imbalance and gender discrimination must all be addressed. I am pleased the government is continuing to push forward on all these fronts.

I congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Justice, for such initiatives as the sentencing reform bill, the firearms control legislation and his quick action to address the defence of extreme drunkenness.

I congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance, for his budget commitment to remove barriers to the success of small businesses and to provide practical assistance to them to survive and grow. It is essential that small businesses have access to the financing they need to continue being Canada's number one creator of jobs.

To this end the budget announced that the government would be working with the banks to develop meaningful performance benchmarks for small business financing, benchmarks that will be used to monitor future progress which will include women.

We must also continue to support women in their family responsibilities. The new Canada social transfer announced in the budget offers the potential for a more flexible framework for child care funding. We need improvements in the accessibility of child care and in the quantity and quality of child care, public and private, in all regions of the land and based on choice in those areas.

As my colleague, the Minister of Human Resources Development, begins his work with the provinces to develop shared principles for the transfer, I know he plans to focus on the needs of women and their families in general and on their requirements for child care in particular.

[Translation]

I will also continue to work with my colleagues to ensure that government policies and programs are examined through a

gender equality lens, so that their impact on women is considered at every stage of the policy development process.

A particular focus must be on the needs of women from different ethnocultural communities, aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and those living in rural or remote areas. We must continue to help them achieve their independence. These are all challenges that we must confront if we are going to achieve our ultimate goal of fairness and equality. This September fourth's United Nations World Conference on Women will be a unique forum for advancing women's equality. It will produce a global Platform for Action to accelerate progress towards equality.

[English]

I look forward to working with the men and women of the world at this conference as we lay the groundwork for eliminating the barriers facing women around the globe. More important, to all my colleagues I say I look forward to coming home from the world conference, getting to work and collaborating with all our stakeholders at the regional, provincial, federal, private and public levels to implement the platform of action for Canada. Our society, and that includes all Canadian men and women, has a responsibility to begin laying the further groundwork for equality right now.

The ongoing push for equality may be entering its most difficult phase. It will require that women stand up for themselves and boldly take the position that is rightfully theirs. It cannot be done by government alone. It cannot be done by one voice, by the voice of opposition on either side of the House.

It will require them to be forceful and advance their views. It will require men to play their role as full partners in this adventure in growth and development. At the very least I would suggest that men acknowledge the current of history. They must recognize that from now on society will be that of equal partners because we have earned that right from the very start.

• (1240)

While some men may still resist this idea, I say to them that equality of the sexes is not only attainable but is desirable from all points of view and for all concerned. Is this not what we all want both for our sons and our daughters?

We need to leave behind the battle of the sexes where women's gains are interpreted as men's losses. We have to accept that when women finally achieve equality everyone will be better off. We will all stand to gain.

I close in reminding everyone that it is purely mathematical because when women who make up 52 per cent of our population are able to make a full contribution to society, 100 per cent of the population will benefit.