

Supply

I would like to start actually with some points of agreement with my hon. colleague who has raised this motion today. I think it is important in this House and for Canadians to see that there is agreement in some areas of discussion of this nature. Certainly one of the areas of agreement would be the issue my hon. colleague raised, that the historical inequalities faced by women go back to the story of Adam and Eve. I would agree with her. That kind of historical reality has been fundamental in our western society.

Indeed it has only been realistically in this last century that we have been able to address and redress some of those significant inequalities. After almost 2,000 years or many more the kinds of changes or the acceleration of change is something we should feel very good about. It is the many Canadian women who have worked so hard during this century to make some of those changes that we would like to honour. That is one of the reasons earlier this month I announced that in October we would be celebrating women's history month, something that I hope will be established right across this country.

I do believe it is important for us to understand our roots, to understand the contribution women make to our society. I hope that all members of the House will join with us in their ridings to promote activities, whether it is honouring the famous five or many other wonderful women in Canadian society.

The second point I would like to agree with that my hon. colleague raised is that I too would dearly love to see 52 per cent of the members of this House being women. That is a goal I am sure all members would agree with.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mrs. Collins: Don't you think? I think we might get some agreement. That indeed would be a more accurate reflection of the reality of society. It is something we are all working on in upcoming elections. That in itself—and I have talked about this in the House and with my colleagues—might help to change some of the way in which we undertake our business. We should to try to find more consensus around issues rather than the constant adversarial approach we are locked into. I think the Canadian public would find that much more acceptable as well.

It is also interesting at this time that many people still have difficulty understanding what we are talking about when we are talking about still having to look at issues relating to women's equality. They say: "Well, you have the vote and you have all these wonderful things. We do not need this any longer".

Recently *Time* magazine ran an article about how feminism is dead. It is important to remind people that although we have made significant advances there are still measures that must follow. We must all work, men and women together, to address those.

Often people say they do not want to be identified with feminism. It has had a host of labels and definitions going back to 1913. This concern about it is not new. Rebecca West, a well-known English author and critic, lamented the public's perception of feminism with this memorable quote: "I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a door-mat". I think in that instance all my colleagues would be feminists.

One of the most interesting definitions I saw recently was one from Nova Scotia in a report done by the Nova Scotia Advisory Committee on the Status of Women in a very nice book it put out. It comes from a grade 10 student. Sometimes we have to go back to the wisdom of our children who often see things in clear terms. She wrote: "A feminist is an intelligent woman of the nineties who believes she can do or accomplish anything a man can do. She knows men and women are equal". Hear, hear. I think that young woman captured feminism in a nutshell. More than that, it indicates an awareness hopefully among young people of the issues we are dealing with as well.

• (1050)

Let me return to the subject we are debating today about fundamental equality and again on the positive side. I have had the opportunity in recent months of visiting with my counterparts in different countries. They have visited Canada and sometimes I have visited their countries in international meetings. One thing they say almost consistently is how lucky we are in Canada, that women here have advanced whether it is the economic sector, whether it is in the political sector or whether it is in the educational sector. We have had structures in place in Canada starting about 20 years ago with the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the various mechanisms to support particularly the activities of women's organizations and groups that have helped us