

report that the Minister of Finance of Ontario made the following statement yesterday after the federal-provincial conference: "The Federal Government seems prepared to maintain the existing financing formula for health programs, but wants to change the calculations for postsecondary education grants, while at the same time seeking wider control over college and university curricula." Can the Minister comment whether the Minister of Finance of Ontario did make that statement to the effect that the Federal Government wants to interfere in a provincial jurisdiction through wider control over education?

**Hon. Serge Joyal (Secretary of State):** Madam Speaker, I would say to the Hon. Member that that statement is totally unfounded. In the course of numerous meetings with my provincial colleagues in the past five months, it has always been agreed that any discussion pertaining to the funding of established programs would have to do exclusively with taxation issues and that it would not have any impact on the orientation to be taken by high schools and universities, in keeping with our Constitution which acknowledges full provincial jurisdiction in the field of education.

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[English]

## STATUS OF WOMEN

### POSITION OF ELDERLY

**Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East):** Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Statistics Canada reports that 40 per cent of marriages end in divorce, leaving more and more women alone in later years. I should like the Minister to comment on what older women told the NDP Task Force on Older Women. They said such things as, "My only hope is to die young so I won't be a burden on society in my later years"; "I'm terrified of being unemployed and alone", or "I feel like a second-class citizen since my husband's death."

● (1440)

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please. Will the Hon. Member please ask her question.

**Mrs. Mitchell:** What does the Government intend to do for such women in their middle and older years, who are the most deprived of our citizens?

[Translation]

**Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Madam Speaker, I would not want us, especially us women in this House to amuse ourselves at the expense of women on this International Women's Day. If the Hon. Member for Vancouver East is now trying to help a woman who says she has a problem of loneliness in her old age, she is not doing so. On the contrary, she is laughing at this problem because the truth of the matter is . . . I am not trying to say that the Government has done great things, but for many

## Oral Questions

years, we have been making steady progress to guarantee that senior citizens, especially those who live alone, three quarters of whom are women, will have pensions which will bring them above the poverty line. The Hon. Member is well aware that we still have to find some funds to make the final step across this line and that it is not so easy at the present time. However, she forgets what we have been doing regularly to ensure that these women, who do not receive a pension at the age of 64 or 61 because the age of eligibility for the federal program is set at 65, and therefore had to rely on provincial welfare payments, which were much lower than—

**Madam Speaker:** Order! Order!

[English]

**Mrs. Mitchell:** I can assure the Minister that I am very serious about this problem, Madam Speaker.

## PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH STANDING COMMITTEE

**Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East):** Madam Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister responsible for the status of women. Yesterday the Minister claimed that a standing committee on the status of women requested by both Opposition Parties would ghettoize women and be regressive. I should like to ask the Minister why such a committee would be regressive when it would deal with all women's issues, would be a focal point for action, would require all Government legislation and programs to be studied, and would be a reference point for women's organizations?

Will the Minister consult with women's organizations to obtain their views on this matter and, if they agree, will she then press for a standing committee on the status of women?

**Hon. Judy Erola (Minister of State (Mines):** Madam Speaker, I could not take the motion put forward yesterday very seriously since it was a non votable motion and since there were very, very few Members of the Opposition present to participate in the debate.

One of the reasons why I do not prefer to have such a committee is that the issues that affect women are not issues that affect women alone, they are societal issues that must be studied in the broadest possible way by every Member of the House and by all Canadians. What the Hon. Member for Vancouver East is suggesting is that we ghettoize the problems of women. Is divorce a women's problem? Is child care a women's problem? Are pensions women's problems? No, they are problems in which we must all participate.