

The Address

dignity of a job. We must therefore design programs which will help them find work.

We know that the poor do not want to live in poverty. Canadians who are able to work do not want to collect welfare. Our programs must therefore help, for example, a single mother who does not have access to child care services; otherwise, she will be forced to remain dependent on the state for many years.

We must admit that Canadians have never faced so many social and economic challenges since the depression of the 1930s.

The structure of our economy is changing and the family unit has been deeply transformed. We must therefore reform our social security system to meet the needs of Canadians today.

The minister of human resources will announce a process to rethink our social security system and to modernize it, in co-operation with the provinces and for the greater good of all Canadians.

[English]

During the course of this debate the Minister of Health will speak about the commitment of this government to health care and to women's health issues. The Minister of Justice will speak about measures we will take to protect individuals from crime and violence in their homes. He will speak about measures which enhance our commitment to the fundamental equality of Canadians.

These are areas in which a society is judged. This government wants to play its role in ensuring the fabric of Canadian life continues to be tolerant and generous and that the quality of life we all cherish and which is so distinctively Canadian improves and benefits all Canadians.

The agenda is full and it will require co-operation and a sense of a shared mission which our country has not seen for a long time, the kind of spirit we saw at the first ministers meeting in December. Canadians are ready for this national will. They want those of us who are in responsible positions in government and the private sector to work together toward those worthy national goals.

[Translation]

I wish to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on his speech. It is a first in the House of Commons, in a quite unprecedented situation, as he said himself. I do not intend to respond to all the arguments he put forward, because I think the debate would be rather sterile. In the election campaign, we talked a lot about jobs, we talked a lot about the deficit in Quebec and we maybe talked a little about independence and separation, but not much. I know that if I got into that subject, I

would not be fulfilling the mandate which I received from the people of our country.

Besides, my convictions are well known. I have been here for many years. I would just like to tell you that my convictions about Canada are based perhaps on a text which describes our country very well. A hundred years ago, one of my predecessors, Laurier, spoke thus, as the twentieth century approached:

We are French Canadians, but our country is not limited to the territory around the Citadel in Quebec; our country is Canada. Our fellow citizens are not only those who have French blood in their veins. They are all those, regardless of race or language, who have come here among us as a result of the vagaries of war or the whims of fortune or by their own choice.

• (1655)

These words are just as appropriate today, on the eve of the 21st century, as they were at the beginning of the 20th century.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): I also want to mention that it is true that we did not get as many votes as the Bloc québécois. We will change that next time, but it is the reality now.

But I have something to say to the hon. members who were elected in Quebec and who are French-speaking Canadians like me. Something happened this week in this House, something which they should have noted. First, we chose a Speaker. Two French-Canadians from Ontario got the same number of votes in the fifth ballot, which means that, at one point, all the members of this House voted for a French Canadian. One won and one lost. But in a sense it is very telling that a person like the hon. member for Ottawa-Vanier who, throughout his career, has always been proud to be a francophone and has always said it loud and clear, got such support.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): The hon. member for Madawaska—Victoria, in New Brunswick, rose in this House to second the motion in reply to the speech from the Throne.

I have had the great honour of being the member for Beauséjour and to rise in this House to represent francophones, francophones from New Brunswick, and Acadians who were deported and who came back. And those one million francophones outside Quebec are part of my country.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Chrétien (Saint-Maurice): The Leader of the Opposition talked about progress and about preparing for the 21st century. I agree with him. I look around this House.

[English]

I see these members of different colours, religions and languages who are all members of the same family in my party and of the same country of Canada.