

The Address

federalism would respond to the needs of Canadians. For that we must have federal institutions.

• (1700)

Institutions do not mean only buildings. Institutions refer to programs that we have in this country. Let me mention national medicare. That is the type of institution I see and the Liberals see that will continue to respond to all Canadians irrespective of geography and with no user fees to make it very specific.

There is the question of how we can avoid overlapping. This government has already announced its plan to eliminate trade barriers that in a sense also allow for duplication. We have plans to eliminate duplication so that small and medium sized businesses can thrive and thrive prosperously.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, may I begin by adding my voice to those of many others who have spoken to congratulate you upon your appointment as Speaker. May I observe that in the few days you have presided it is already evident through your leadership in the House that members will better achieve the objective we all share which is a forum of civility and decorum acting in the public interest.

I feel enormously proud to take my place in this Chamber as the representative of Etobicoke Centre. The riding I represent is a diverse and a vital one whose needs and strengths reflect to a great degree those of Canada in these challenging times. During the election campaign, as was the case with so many of my colleagues, I had the opportunity to visit over 30,000 doorways in Etobicoke Centre and among other things I learned first hand the extent to which Canadians everywhere feel strongly about the important justice issues of our day. For me it is a great privilege to be in this Chamber not only as the member of Parliament for my constituents but also as their representative in cabinet dealing with justice issues.

It has been said that justice is the first of the social virtues. In its absence all else seems contrived. When the scales are in balance the way is open for the best in our nature to emerge.

[Translation]

As Minister of Justice of Canada, I am fully aware of my duty to initiate the development of policies and proposals to strengthen our justice system, which without the shadow of a doubt is one of the best, most flexible and fairest in the world.

Canadians have a system of justice that is bilingual and drawn from two different legal systems; the international community considers it to be a model of tolerance, integrity and openness. Although two distinct legal systems are developing, at the same time, they serve to advance a single idea in Canada, the primacy of law.

[English]

During these past 10 weeks I have worked with members of the department of justice and my colleagues to identify the immediate priorities for this portfolio at this time.

I wish to take this opportunity to outline for the House at least in general terms the priorities which we see as the most urgent.

In recent weeks I have had the opportunity to meet with members of the parties opposite, or at least some of them, to discuss their perspectives with respect to justice matters. I have found that they have valuable perspectives, that I look forward to working with them and that we have really common objectives in the public service so far as justice issues are concerned. That will ensure that Canada has the best and most effective system of justice possible. I respect their perspectives and, as I say, I look forward to working with them.

• (1705)

The justice agenda I will describe today falls generally into three categories: first, measures to deal with violence and initiatives to prevent crime; second, proposals to ensure the law promotes equality in the diversity of today's Canada and provides for equal access to justice; and third, steps to modernize our laws so they reflect current values and meet the challenge of changing times.

Let me acknowledge at the outset that which must be evident. It will be impossible for us to achieve meaningful progress on any justice issues without collaboration with our provincial and territorial counterparts. So much that is on our agenda involves shared jurisdictions. It needs co-operative collaboration. We cannot succeed alone and I acknowledge that at the outset. I will work with my provincial counterparts in addressing the objectives which I will describe today.

Let me first deal with measures dealing with violence and initiatives to prevent crime. The speech from the throne contained a commitment to enhance community safety and crime prevention. Canadians are determined to preserve the peaceful, orderly and safe communities that reflect our society's values. One of Canada's defining characteristics is our deep sense of order and civility. Yet in a society that abhors crime and violence, there is increasing concern for the safe and peaceful communities we feel are being threatened by crime, and particularly violent crime.

The time has come for us to send the message loud and clear that violence in any form will not be tolerated. We shall not stand for it from any individual, from any group, of any age. Yet our response to the problems of crime and violence must also reflect the very values that we seek to preserve. We must not simply become harsh, although stern measures will sometimes be required. We must recognize and address the causes of crime and put appropriate emphasis on rehabilitation, on treatment where that is required.