

Americans today than all the Fortune 500 companies combined. That is a staggering statistic.

• (1540)

The force of women in the United States is becoming a recognized fact. I do not believe that it has hit the consciousness of this country yet or sunk in to all of us in this Chamber who are presently charged with redesigning the social security system.

As the minister has asked us for ideas during this debate, I would like to present the idea that we consider as a Chamber and as a government to set up women in business centres all across Canada. I am talking about centres the purpose of which would be to offer women training and support in developing businesses. We are talking about centres that would facilitate access to capital for women in business, centres that would be test sites for innovative, educational and technological efforts. These centres would also act as a catalyst for business and entrepreneurial opportunity. It would ultimately improve the business and entrepreneurship capability in Canada.

I have to talk about a personal experience for a moment that is driving me in this direction about women in business. My grandmother was a widow at age 48. She had 14 children but at age 48 she still had eight of those children at home. Four of her sons had gone off to join the RCAF, one of them being my father.

This single mother was left with eight children at home. We are talking now about the early 1940s. She had a small, home based business. It was a very simple business. She rented tables and chairs for banquets, weddings and social functions. My grandmother managed, because of her own creativity and her hard work, to raise that family of eight children under her roof and to provide a respectable living for all of them. As time went on she eventually developed the business and it grew into something that looked after many other families other than her own children.

My point in bringing this example up is that this happened at a time when there was absolutely no unemployment insurance and no welfare system. There was no social security system to look after a single mother in the early 1940s who had eight children. They had to use their own creativity, their own work ethics and had to rely on their friends and neighbours. Certainly there was not a lot of support from the banks for a widowed mother with eight children. That just was not part of the scene in those days.

That example of what an individual can do under great stress for me has always been testimony that if there is a will there is a way as long as there is some kind of support system from your friends and community.

I think what the minister of human resources is saying to us in this debate is that defending the status quo which is not working

is not in the cards and by wanting to defend the status quo we are defending a decline, not to mention the fact that we are spending almost \$40 billion a year and we are not getting the results.

Government Orders

When we go through this exercise we have to look at every idea presented to us. I use as an example my grandmother who was a single mother with eight children at home. She built a family business from her home with no government grants, no support. It shows me that if we give a little bit of support to women in business throughout the country, we can probably get a lot more Canadians working. The most important thing is to raise the standard of living of a lot of women who are currently trapped in a welfare system that is certainly not working. It is a system that none of us in the House wants to defend.

• (1545)

I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. It is a comprehensive challenge that the minister has placed before us but if we use the premise that we put all of the ideas on the table and keep an open mind concerning those ideas, then I believe at the end of this exercise we can create a new social security system that will be the envy of the world.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am also glad to see you again. We did not forget you while you were away.

I listened very carefully to what my colleague had to say. Of course, in 15 or 20 minutes, he could not touch on all the various aspects. Given the examples he used concerning the family, the underprivileged women and all the problems he mentioned, I would have liked to hear his views on education.

Unemployment is the big problem. It is an economic problem and we have to pay for it. Unemployment causes other problems to develop. For example, our youth are faced with problems like dropping out of school, drug and alcohol abuse, and so on. In the reform currently under review, we are being asked to reconsider student loans. I, for one, say that education is the cornerstone of the whole system.

If we do not invest in areas like human sciences, where we should inject a lot of money into research and development when, in fact, we are cutting research, if, as I said, we do not give education all the tools needed to catch up in this area and to undertake important research projects, we are heading not only for bankruptcy, but for real chaos.

I would like my colleague to comment on these cuts in education and research and development, which the government wants Canadians to swallow.