

*Routine Proceedings**[Translation]*

As I said earlier, I realize that a question of privilege is a serious matter for all parliamentarians. As is customary, the Chair will certainly prefer to wait until the hon. member for Guelph—Wellington is present to hear what she has to say.

[English]

The Chair will certainly want to give an opportunity to the member for Guelph—Wellington to express her point of view more before making a definitive ruling.

I want to thank the well experienced hon. member for Sherbrooke for raising this question of privilege and the chief government whip, the member for Berthier—Montcalm, the member for Kindersley—Lloydminster and the member for Kingston and the Islands for their participation.

The matter raised by the hon. member for Sherbrooke, if founded, is more an issue of contempt than a question of privilege. That being said, the Chair will take the matter under advisement, review the hon. member's comments as well as all related parliamentary practice and precedents, and report back to the House as soon as possible.

Mr. Charest: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. government whip kindly offered to table a document that the member for Guelph—Wellington apparently sent to him. I suggest to the House that there be unanimous consent so that document could be now tabled.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS*[Translation]***GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to certain petitions.

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• (1230)

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Hon. Sheila Finestone (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism) (Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next week, on March 8, women and men around the world will celebrate International Women's Day.

This day was designated in honour of these early campaigns to improve working conditions for women. This day has become a global celebration of women's accomplishments and advancements. But it was born when women were struggling to achieve the very basics of equal rights.

[English]

In the ensuing years women have made many important gains, overcoming many obstacles to achieve through merit their rightful place in the workforce. They have overcome professional barriers in virtually every field of human endeavour. They have overcome many stereotypes and have excelled in fields where doors were closed before such as medicine, law, politics, cultural industries, military, business and so on.

Women have demonstrated conclusively that no task is beyond them, given fair and equitable access. Women have also achieved success in the business world. A recent study conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that almost 40 per cent of small businesses are operated by women, up from 30 per cent in 1981.

Women have steadily progressed in closing the wage gap. The average Canadian woman now makes 72 cents of what a man earns. More important, for university graduates the gap is gone. Young women and young men starting out in their careers with the same university education earn the same salary.

Although women have made inroads into almost every profession they still face multiple challenges. Sexual harassment in the workplace continues to undermine and marginalize the position of women. Many still face obstacles to advancement: either the famous glass ceiling that stops women's progress at middle management levels or the corporate philosophy that is overly hostile to family considerations.

[Translation]

The recent Statistics Canada study on the wage gap was quite revealing on this point. While young women start off on an equal footing, wage-wise, when they graduate from university, they steadily lose ground as they get married and have children.

Even most of the independent and ambitious women who go boldly into the business world hit the wall of sexual discrimination. And a study by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business revealed that 42 per cent of women entrepreneurs experience difficulty getting financing. This despite the fact that women entrepreneurs are generally more successful than men.

We must address these issues. After all, women work for the same reasons men do—they want and they have to. Women's contributions to our economy, and to our society, are indisputable and indispensable.

[English]

It is estimated that if all employed women were to leave the workforce, the number of low income families in Canada would