

The Budget

void. The modern Canadian women's movement was in its infancy. Women lacked a strong voice in the public arena. They also lacked vehicles through which they could advance equality.

Since then Canadian women have made progress in government, in education, in business and in the academic world. More important, women have formed hundreds of small, medium and large organizations throughout the country to ensure that their needs and concerns are heard and met.

These local, regional and national organizations work in many fields like violence against women, child care, the treatment of women in the health, justice and immigration systems, and the needs of women entrepreneurs among others.

As our society evolved the need for some of the functions of the council changed. Over the years its role as an interpreter of the voices of women has been overtaken by many strong, established national, regional and local women's organization.

We owe a great deal to the pioneers who worked within the advisory council. I salute the years of hard work and dedication of the committed women and men who have served the advancement of women through the advisory council.

I wish good luck to its outgoing president. She has been very helpful in my thinking the whole approach through and looking at new avenues for creativity and new dimensions of the work we are about to undertake.

• (1545)

The vitality and the strength of today's women's organizations and the dedication of their members will ensure that the important work done by the advisory council will continue. Its independent research capacity and its ability to consult and communicate information to women and the general public and its documentation centre as well are important supports to public policy making.

Therefore, these functions and the associated financial resources will be maintained. Its initiatives will enhance our ability to understand and respond to women's equality issues that take shape at the grassroots level and create a new synergy between research, policy development and the government's programs.

The consolidation of these three organizations will, I outline and summarize, create a single window operation; eliminate confusion and improve access to government; provide the government with a critical mass of expertise on women's issues; improve research, communications and public information services; strengthen links with local, regional and national organizations, NGOs and universities; ensure that funding for research that is independent of government continues to be available; and allow the government to focus its efforts toward promoting equality for Canadian women.

Since the day the Prime Minister appointed me as Secretary of State for the Status of Women, I have been meeting with women's organizations across this land. I have been having round table discussions with them and with many of the groups here in Ottawa. I have listened to their concerns with a great deal of interest.

In the new structure we will work to reinforce our collaborative partnerships and our abilities to network on a broad spectrum of issues by ensuring the involvement of these many women's organizations with their differing perspectives and the voluntary sectors and the universities works well.

I also want to explore how we can use the new communications technology in this new era of information. I would like to see us build an ongoing dialogue with our constituency using Internet and E-mail or both, or library net. These are all fabulous ways to keep in touch and keep informed and we want to do just exactly that.

[Translation]

We want to make sure that women become full-fledged partners in our society. As the Prime Minister rightly said recently: "In Canada, women continue to further the cause of economic equality. Relying on their own means and abilities, women help shape the future of this country. As for the Canadian government, it is meeting the challenge. Women's equality is not a matter of special interests or rights, but rather a matter of social and economic justice, a matter of good government".

[English]

We will work together and work toward equality in partnership with women, men, and the public and private sectors to overcome the obstacles that are still blocking our way. It is by involving the talents and dedication of every Canadian, all of us, that we continue to enhance our prosperity and make this country still a better place in which to live. When we involve all of its people we are in the best position possible to make things work.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member for her convincing speech on the continuous struggle of women towards equality. I have two daughters and I do hope that they will live in a society where equality will be even more of a reality.

My question concerns some measures which seem in contradiction with the objectives and arguments stated by the hon. member.

First, one of the recommendations made by the Liberal majority on the human resources development committee provides that future UI beneficiaries, that is those who never received UI benefits before—this means a majority of young people and women—will have to work a greater number of weeks than other beneficiaries to be eligible for UI benefits and these benefits will be less than those that will be paid to people who have already been in the system for years. This seems to be