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STATUS OF WOMEN

Violence against Women

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, March 25, 2010

THE SENATE

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[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, the Speech from the Throne announced the government's intention to reduce violence against women.

Can the Leader of the Government tell us what prevention measures are included in its plan?

[English]

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): I thank the honourable senator for the question. Obviously violence against women should not and will not be tolerated. The government has already undertaken a long list of initiatives, including, as was mentioned in the Throne Speech, the many Aboriginal women who are missing or have been murdered, as well as the support of the Sisters in Spirit movement.

There is a long list, honourable senators, and I will be happy to provide Senator Tardif with a list not only of our intentions going forward but also of many of the good things that have been done in the past. The issue of violence against women is not a political or partisan one. It is the social responsibility of all of us, men and women, and all levels of government. It is a situation that must not be tolerated.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, violence against women and against handicapped women continues to increase. In Canada, there are 1.9 million women with a functional limitation.

I would like to know what specific measures are going to be put in place to prevent violence against handicapped women.

[English]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, it is totally disgusting that people are being taken advantage of because of any type of physical or mental incapacity.

As the honourable senator knows, a number of things have been done to assist disabled people through HRSDC and through tax measures to enhance their living standards. With regard to the issue of violence, I am quite certain, honourable senators, that the RCMP, Public Safety, and the Department of Justice all have measures and, hopefully, penalties in place to deal with people who commit these types of crimes. All forms of violence are to be abhorred, especially that which is directed toward people who cannot defend themselves.

• (1430)

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, I was asking specifically what was in the government's plan and not what the police were to do.

However, when introducing funds for Young Women: Learning and Leading for Change that was set to promote the participation in leadership and decision-making roles of girls and young women, your colleague, the Minister of State for the Status of Women, announced on March 19 that:

The project specifically targets marginalized young women in British Columbia, Yukon, Quebec, the Northwest Territories and Ontario and helps deliver the leadership skills they need to address issues of violence prevention, economic security, civic engagement and demographic participation.

While I welcome projects helping women raise their voices to prevent violence against women, I am concerned that the burden of violence prevention relies solely on women. Violence against women affects everyone in society, not only women.

Can the leader tell us what measures are taken to get men involved in the prevention of violence against women?

Senator LeBreton: The honourable senator asked for the government response and I mentioned the Departments of Justice and Public Safety and the police. Although the police are not, by definition, members of the government, they serve the public and are employed by government in the larger sense.

Honourable senators, the responsibility and funding for this issue are through the Minister of State for the Status of Women. I dare say, and I hope that Senator Tardif agrees with me, that there are as many men as women who participate fully in this matter of prevention of violence against women.

I want to put on the record, honourable senators, that in highlighting these issues, our government increased the budget of the women's program at Status of Women Canada to its highest level ever. Investments are given directly to those who need it through program spending and not into the operational overhead costs of Status of Women. Funding has been increased to grassroots organizations that directly benefit women. The number of individual projects funded has increased by 69 per cent, and 47 per cent of groups are receiving funding for the first time.

Last fiscal year alone, Status of Women Canada provided over \$7 million in funding to projects to improve women's economic security. Since 2007, through Status of Women Canada — and this is only Status of Women and not programs in the other departments I mentioned — we have invested over \$26 million and supported over 117 projects directly to address the issue of violence against women.