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Tuesday, May 16, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

Gender Equality Week Act

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-309, An Act to establish Gender Equality Week, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my colleague, looking at gender equality week and all the things that we can do to promote women and young girls. I have listened to the gender equality budget, the quota system, being tokens, and being put on boards. I have to say that I and many women with whom I have had the honour of serving politically or in the private sector would suggest that teaching young girls that just because they are female they can get any position really is offensive to many, and certainly to me, who has really gone through the trials and tribulations in my life to get to where I am today. One has to make the sacrifices and to live those sacrifices to really understand what that journey looks like. To suggest that we have a token—that a person is a female so she gets this position, or she is female so she gets on this board, or they are a minority so they can have this—I think does considerable disservice to all of us. I really think it is incumbent on each and every one of us to do what we can do in terms of empowering people around us, especially young girls.

I go back to my time of almost a decade as mayor of the City of Surrey. Since 1996, we had a majority of women on council. We had a majority of women making decisions for the city. Was it a token position? No, it was not. Was it gender equity? No, it was not. It was because they wanted to participate, they wanted to be part of the community, and we wanted to encourage other women to join in having a say on the issues that were really relevant to our community. In that context, it really was self-empowering, in terms of what we were able to accomplish as a

collective. If we are short on the quota, not having enough women in politics, or not having enough women on a board, then it is incumbent upon us to do a better job.

I have two daughters. I would never, from the day they were born, let them know that they were a quota, that they were a token, that they could get a position because they were female. That is not the way I brought up my daughters. I brought them up to be strong young women who were empowered. I taught them to make sure they empower the people around them, that we work collectively together, we go through trials, we go through tribulations, and we get to where we go because the journey is the lessons of where we get to.

That in itself gives me satisfaction, as a woman of my age. It demeans everything that I have done, everything that I have taught my daughters, when I sit there and I listen to people say we have to have a token representation here and a token representation there. That is totally offensive, and I do not think that is what we should be teaching our children.

Furthermore, I would just suggest that what we can do—because it is not about what we cannot do, but rather what we can do—is really come together as a community, as parents, mothers, fathers. There are single moms, single dads, and children who need to be brought up in a community that has resiliency. We need to make sure that they have all the tools, all the education, and all of those things; that we have resilient communities; that we have empowered children; that we ensure that our kids know that they need to look after and give their hand out to somebody who is less fortunate than themselves. That is where we make a difference, and that is where we have empowerment within our communities, within our families, and that is what makes us stronger.

While I honestly appreciate my colleague, and I sit on many committees with him and respect him to the utmost degree, I would suggest that when we do not have gender equality week will be a good day in this House.