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one of the main reasons why this program was established as an autonomous agency.

The Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons, of which I am a member, has called the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship to appear as witnesses before our committee to answer questions concerning the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program.

The ministers have replied that they are unavailable. We have invited them to appear at any time at their convenience. They have sent their deputy ministers instead. I believe this shows a lack of respect for this parliamentary committee. I certainly can understand why they are reluctant to answer questions on this issue, because they would have to defend the indefensible. No doubt they are aware that our committee strongly supports this program, even Conservative Party members of the committee.

The Minister of Justice, who has a reputation as a supporter of women's rights, must find her position extremely uncomfortable. But as ministers of the Crown, it is their responsibility to explain and defend this decision of the government.

Members of my party have been asking ourselves the question: Why? Why has the government taken this callous step against the human rights for women and other disadvantaged groups? What is the real reason that this program has been cancelled? Let me say that no one believes it is really because of deficit reduction, or because there is enough jurisprudence. No one is buying these explanations.

I find it an extremely disturbing coincidence that the leader of the Reform Party had called for elimination of this program. It was very apparent to everyone in this House that the government's budget was carefully designed to win back Conservative supporters lost to the Reform Party.

It certainly gives an indication of the Reform Party's lack of commitment to human rights. But even more disturbing it raises the question: Who is in charge here?

Who is running this government? Is it the Prime Minister or is it Preston Manning?

More and more it seems like it does not really make much difference. The two parties are not all that different anyway, the main difference being that the Reform Party is a more extreme version of Mulroneyism.

I referred earlier to the economic disparities between men and women in this country. When we see the shocking figures we realize that we have a long way to go before true equality for women is achieved. True equality includes economic equality. It means equality in everyday life, equality in practice, not just in theory.

We see very clearly the need for initiatives like the Court Challenges Program.

We constantly hear this government boasting about its record on women's issues. That is not good enough. Actions speak louder than words.

We in the Liberal Party condemn this government for its budget and its shocking lack of commitment for equality for women in Canada.

Mr. Joe Fontana (London East): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in this House today in support of the opposition motion of my colleague, the member for Halifax, which reads:

That this House condemn the government for its failure to protect and promote the fundamental rights of Canadian women, especially as reflected in the 1992 budget.

Before I deal with that issue specifically, let me just say something with respect to the budget. As we all know, really the budget was a do-nothing budget. It was a one-day wonder that neither captured the attention of the Canadian public nor met the needs of the Canadian public.

In fact 1.5 million Canadians are still unemployed, most of whom are women. It did absolutely nothing for the people on social assistance, most of whom are women. It did absolutely nothing for small businesses which are finding themselves in very difficult circumstances and which are also headed by women. The budget in actual fact did very little to solve the economic ills of this country.