

*Adjournment Debate*

We know the \$1.6 million has been cut. Last year and in the years previous—ever since the Liberal government instituted these programs—women could look to core funding to keep their centres open and project funding to do the specific works they wished to perform. What has effectively taken place is that the government is asking these women and the women across Canada to share in a still smaller pot that relates to project funding, thus dividing and pitting women against each other right across this country.

I must say I am proud in the extreme of the women involved in these centres across the country. The Second Storey women's centre in my home province of Nova Scotia, in the riding of South Shore in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia was offered a cheque last Thursday. They have delayed its acceptance because they said they will not be used as a pawn, and compete with other women across this country for ever-decreasing funds.

There is a meeting this week with the Secretary of State when he will meet with representatives, as I understand it, of all the centres outside Quebec. That was not quite what the women were looking for. They wanted representatives from each of the affected centres. However, I suppose this meeting is better than nothing.

The problem is that we are not going to hear the answer that we need to hear, which is that core funding has been re-established.

In the 18 months since I have come to this Chamber, we have all heard and we all agree that there needs to be cut-backs in this country. No one disagrees that there is a need to reduce the deficit. But we are talking about \$1.6 million. I must say that in my youth, growing up in Cape Breton and Halifax I never thought I could look at \$1.6 million and say that it is peanuts, but in the grand scheme of things, it is not going to do a whole heck of a lot to help the government balance its budget. Yet it is going to do a whole lot of damage to a whole lot of women right across this country.

I know I have not much time, but I want to speak briefly about some of the things that I, in 20 years of working with women's groups like this, have seen in

terms of what these centres do. These centres cover almost every possible crisis situation that affects women, much more so in rural Canada even than in the urban centres.

In the urban centres, although we are not terribly well off for support programs for women, there are places such as transition houses and emergency units of hospitals. There are doctors and legal aid centres and so on depending on what the problem is. There are universities which have certain programs. That is not enough and it does not cover it all but there is some recourse.

For the Canadian women living in rural areas, and I am thinking now particularly of Second Storey on the South Shore of Nova Scotia and the Antigonish Women's Centre, this is the only game in town. Women who are alienated and isolated do not know that they can get legal advice, medical advice, social work help or any kinds of help to pull them out of an untenable situation, whether it be an abusive situation physically, or a financial problem such as the inability to heat their homes or feed their children.

What they do know is that on the main street of the nearest town there is that place where women go, and they phone or drop in.

• (1815 )

One of the groups I talked to yesterday told me that it had 400 phone calls last month and 200 drop in visits—600 women used one of those centres last month. With core funding gone those 600 women will have no place to turn. That 600 is multiplied by the 70-plus centres across this country that are in danger of closing down. The women of Canada do not deserve this. They deserve all the help they can get.

Why does the government not make it easier on itself and turn around and say: "We made a mistake. You can have your core funding back. We realize and we know how important women centres are to the full development of women in our society, to the search for gender equality"?

It is not a big request, but it will help so many women who are in situations where from their perspective there is no help or no way out. These are women who wake up in the morning and cannot see any future for themselves and for their children.