

This is part of the Committee's mandate, within its jurisdiction over the Citizenship Development Activity of the Secretary of State Department. The objective of this activity is to ensure that all Canadians have equal and fair opportunities to further their development in society, and to participate in shaping their social, cultural and economic development.

The Committee has noted that the Nielsen Task Force Study Team on Citizenship, Labour and Immigration reviewed the Women's Program in 1985 and found that it was well received by women's groups across Canada and that in view of the government's commitment to improving the status of women, funding cuts in this area would not be appropriate.

Although the Program has been criticized by the Culture and Communications Study Team for excessively addressing the needs of "upwardly-mobile middle class professional women," the Study Team on Citizenship did not substantiate this criticism. It recommended that the Program be continued and also that an explicit criterion for priority in funding should be that a grant proposal "reflects the views and needs of the widest possible cross-section of Canadian women."

The Committee agreed to examine the objectives and funding criteria of the Women's Program, and set a deadline of April 15, 1987 to hear witnesses and solicit briefs, and agreed to submit a report to the House of Commons on its findings not later than June 30, 1987.

Our first witness, on February 3, 1987, was Under Secretary of State Jean. T. Fournier. He testified that the government is committed to working towards the elimination of barriers that limit the choices and opportunities of women and that the Women's Program plays an important role in supporting this goal.

He also clarified the general goals of the Secretary of State Women's Program, which are "to give financial assistance to groups and organizations working to improve the economic, social and legal situation of women whether in the home, the workplace, the community or the world at large." Mr. Fournier agreed that a review of the Program is both necessary and timely.

Response to word of the Committee's review was so swift and overwhelming that it was decided not to limit the evidence provided only to groups able to appear before the Committee in Ottawa. Accordingly, the Committee sought and received permission from the House of Commons to travel in an attempt to hear women's groups from all regions of the country.

Because of time constraints, the Committee decided to hear organizations rather than individuals and not to hear testimony on either side of the abortion question.