

*Supply*

Now these men have lived together on a same sex relationship for something like 40 years. It is a long established relationship. They in fact have grown old together. Unfortunately they are not the same age so that one is now entitled to his old age pension and the other, had he been of a different sex, would have been entitled to the spouses allowance.

How can somebody who is in receipt of old age pension and is in need of a spouses allowance, how can somebody in that type of financial condition take this issue to court and have any reasonable hope of having the court respond when he really does not have the money to do it.

These people took their case to the first stage, to trial division in the Federal Court. They ended up with a judge who brought down a regressive decision that actually set back the rights of those kinds of couples years and years.

• (1910 )

They were hoping to be able to go on through the appeal process, through the higher courts. In fact, they were promised by the Court Challenges Program that the funding would be there and they could proceed to have this resolved in the upper courts so that one of the same sex partnership would end up being entitled to the spouse's allowance.

Unfortunately your program cut them off in mid process and left the state of the law with respect to same sex couples worse than it was before the process started.

I heard the member from New Brunswick state that cases that are in process now are going to continue in process until they have a resolution.

I am wondering if that would apply to the Egan-Nesbitt case. Are they going to be permitted by the Court Challenges Program to finish the process until they get a final decision in the upper courts or are they going to be cut off and leave the state of the law in Canada with respect to individual rights in this case worse than it was before the process started.

It is very important that a lot of these cases that have been left hanging have resulted in the law being even worse than it was before those cases started.

This minister and I have had a number of words over the years about programs which have been cut by his ministry when he was Secretary of State. Unfortunately

those cuts had been directed at the people who were least responsible for the deficit and who were the least able to fight back, the weakest, the poorest, the most disadvantaged.

This was the minister who cut off the aboriginal communications program when he was responsible for the Department of the Secretary of State.

This was the minister who cut off the aboriginal representative organization funding program, the AFN and other organizations that represent aboriginal people across this country when he was Secretary of State.

This was the minister who cut off support for women's centres across the country when he was Secretary of State. Now that he is minister of multiculturalism, he again takes a direct attack on those who can least afford it. He does this through the Court Challenges Program.

Is it something about this minister or is it something about this government? Why is it that they constantly direct their attacks against those who are poor, disabled, disadvantaged, those who can least expect to defend themselves. That is my problem with this.

Again, I would like to thank the member for Ottawa—Vanier for bringing this motion forward. I would hope that the government would respond more positively to it. Unfortunately, this is a government that is extremely secretive and extremely close in the way it holds power to itself and does not let that power out to the people.

We do not have an ombudsman in this House as we do in virtually every province across this country. We do not have other mechanisms in this House to allow citizens to have input and challenge for their rights.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission is considered a toothless body because it has very little in the way of power that it requires in order to assist citizens who feel they have been the object of discrimination and injustice.

Is it something about this government? Is it something about this minister? All I am saying is that something has to be done. I hope the government and this minister in particular will reconsider the decision he has taken on the Court Challenges Program so that the disadvantaged will not be further disadvantaged in pursuing their rights under the Charter.