

In its report tabled in the House in 1989, the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons, consisting of members of all three political parties in the House, was unanimous in recognizing the fact that this program was important, effective and indispensable, and recommended that the government extend the program until the year 2000.

Initially the program was funded by the Department of the Secretary of State, in co-operation with the Department of Justice. I was here in 1977 when the program started, as a result of the Forest case in Manitoba. The program's administration was later transferred in 1985 to the Canadian Council for Social Development, under an agreement with the federal government. This agreement expired in July 1990.

At the time, the Secretary of State announced that the program would be administered by the Human Rights Research and Education Centre of the University of Ottawa, for a period of five years until 1995. When it announced the termination of this program in the budget, the government broke its contract with the centre and the program's staff.

[English]

From 1985 to February 27, 1992 the program financed about 250 cases, 77 of which were about linguistic rights. The program is at the origin of the most significant rulings in the interpretation of our Constitution on linguistic rights and equality rights.

Speaking of equality rights, I want to pay special tribute to our critic, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, who cannot be here today. She is in hospital. We would like to send Shirley our best wishes.

Looking at the rulings of the Supreme Court of Canada, one could mention the Manitoba appeal on legislative bilingualism in Manitoba, the Mahé ruling on school administration in Alberta, the Swain ruling on the rights of mentally handicapped people, the Tétreault-Gaboury ruling on the rights of people 65 years and older and the Canadian Newspapers Company regarding the confidentiality of victims of sexual abuse.

This program helped Canadians clarify their rights. I know that the majority does not like sometimes to be told by the courts that it is not as generous, as open, as caring as it should be or as the Constitution of this country accords Canadians.

[Translation]

As official languages critic for the Liberal Party, Mr.

Supply

Speaker, I could give you a list of all the cases funded by this program and heard by the courts. I must say the program was extremely helpful in clarifying these issues.

There have been a number of letters and other forms of communication from private citizens and organizations across the country, protesting the termination of this program. One expression of concern came from the *Association culturelle franco-canadienne de la Saskatchewan*, in a letter to the Prime Minister dated March 4, 1992. and I quote:

Universal access to the courts to defend our basic rights—one of the pillars of Canadian democracy—has vanished, which is a matter of utmost concern.

• (1540)

Another quote from the Federation of Francophone and Acadian Communities of Canada to the Prime Minister dated March 16, 1992 said:

We have had to take almost all provincial governments to court for them to stop humiliating us and depriving us of our schools.

Another one is an editorial in *Le Droit* dated February 3, 1992:

The Court Challenges Program was the best way that minorities and a whole range of disadvantaged groups had to protect themselves from the continual abuse of various levels of government.

Another quote is from the Association of French School Boards of Ontario, dated March 31, 1992, yesterday:

If the Court Challenges Program is not reinstated, the government will have sealed the fate of minority language rights and it will be possible to violate them with impunity, and the official-language minorities will be unable to challenge such action in court.

On March 9, 1992, the Canadian Bar Association wrote:

It seems ironical that this program was cancelled on the day before the Beaudoin-Dobbie Report was published, since this report deals with challenges to equality rights and the rights of linguistic minorities.

[English]

The press release of the Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled of March 2, 1992 stated:

Cancelling the Court Challenges Program and cutting Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's co-operative housing program will make it more difficult for people with disabilities to achieve equality within the existing system.