

Wilson recently wrote the Minister of Justice to express dismay and distress over the cancellation of this program which has an annual budget of \$2.75 million. She said:

It is totally illusory to confer rights on people who do not have the means to enforce them, and I assumed that the expansion of the Court Challenges program was an effort to address this problem. While I fully appreciate, of course, that all governments are currently in a period of financial restraint, I must say that I have difficulty with a policy that places the burden of that restraint on those who can least afford to bear it.

As a member of the Supreme Court, Wilson said she witnessed how invaluable the program had been to minority groups and the disadvantaged. She went on to point out: "I believe I can say with complete confidence that the public has unquestionably received full value for its money on this particular program".

• (1240)

That program provided funding of up to \$35,000 at each court level to individuals and non-profit groups for test cases challenging federal laws and policies under the charter's language and equality guarantees.

The Conservative chairman of the all-party committee, the member for Oxford, has written to the Prime Minister to protest as well. He said: "We are optimistic we might be able to persuade the government to find some other ways of providing this kind of service".

But the multiculturalism minister and member for Pierrefonds-Dollard said the program has outlived its usefulness and the provinces will have to step in to fill the gap. While this program was established in 1978 to help fund minority language rights cases, it was extended in 1985 after the powerful equality section of the charter was proclaimed. I recall being part of the committee that reviewed that particular section 15 of the charter and made the recommendation to enlarge the challenges program.

The third point I bring to your attention—

[Translation]

—is the spouse's allowance program that was meant to help disadvantaged older people under 65 until they became eligible for Old Age Security benefits and the guaranteed income supplement.

Page 101 of the budget papers shows the government's intention to seriously reconsider the spouse's allowance

Supply

program if the courts ruled that it had to be extended to divorced and single people. If this government acts, this measure will affect the most vulnerable and economically weakest people aged 60 to 64, largely women.

In addition, I would draw attention to this month's increase in Old Age Security benefits. The amount of 37 cents is really insulting; the previous increase was 75 cents. Certainly that is not enough. You cannot buy a cup of coffee or even a slice of bread for that amount.

Another thing that I would mention is the downgrading of pay equity. Finally, I would call attention to the cuts for social housing.

On the subject of salaries, not only did this government abolish the Pay Research Bureau but it also announced a reduction in back pay for public servants. Indeed, the government does not intend to grant more compensation for the period before November 1, 1990, and it will take the required action in Parliament to implement this decision. This means that if you don't like something, you abolish it. For 80,000 public servants, this is a rejection of the principle of pay equity.

Finally, there is the subject of isolated or single mothers who need social housing. This government announced that the growth in spending on social housing would be limited to 3 per cent until 1997. On that point, I would mention that this government not only reduced the number of social housing spaces by nearly 50 per cent but it also abolished the co-operative housing program, which nevertheless was cost-effective and made it possible for seniors, one-parent families, the disabled and the poor to live in affordable housing.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I again draw to your attention that this budget is disgusting for women and certainly for people in financial difficulty.

Mrs. Lise Bourgault (Argenteuil—Papineau): Mr. Speaker, as I listen to the hon. member for Mount Royal, the first thing that comes to my mind is that it would be absolutely necessary for the government to be able to print money in order to solve the numerous problems that many Canadians are facing.

It is absolutely absurd to hear things such as: "If the government must review the allowance program for widows, this could be applied to divorced people and others that might need that money". It sounds as though the government is no longer capable to act because it is