

Supply

The day after the budget we heard the Minister of National Health and Welfare announce that he had the privilege of killing the national child care program, a telling description, if ever I heard one.

Another major blow to the rights of women, a blow to the heart of the battle for agenda equality in this country was the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program. That is a disgrace, something that Canadians as a group should hang their heads over, but this government, most particularly, should hang its head.

The Court Challenges Program was one of the most innovative and progressive programs sponsored by this government. In other words, in a desert it was one of the few plants that was bearing fruit to benefit the people of Canada. It was a low cost program, \$8.5 million over five years. That is not a lot of money.

I say to the hon. chairman of the justice committee it is not a lot of money when you are talking about equality rights. The hon. member thinks it is a lot of money. I wonder if he would think it was a lot of money if he were one of the disadvantaged that could take advantage of this program to right their wrongs, but the hon. member, being a white, I presume, Anglo-Saxon, and I presume again on his religion, Protestant or Catholic, in this country does not have to deal with the discrimination that women and visible minorities and the physically challenged and other disadvantaged groups in this country have to deal with. Yes, he turns his head. I am not surprised.

It was a low-cost program. Its cancellation will mean little for deficit reduction but the implicit message underlined by my hon. colleague over there is that this government is not prepared to help those least able to help themselves in the struggle for equality. What does this say about us as a country? What does it say about our heritage and our history in the realm of human rights? It says that the government laboured and brought forth a mouse.

Without the funding that this program provided, equality for women is a hollow concept in most instances. The charter is a mechanism for striking down discriminatory laws, but it is not one that grants access unless you have the money to pay for it. It does not guarantee access to the courts so that individuals or groups of women may challenge laws that are indeed discriminatory.

• (1020)

Going on in this same vein, women make up 52 per cent of the population. How many times have I said this in this House? How many times have others of us said this in the House *ad nauseam*? We are the majority in this country, but we are the majority who do not have either a voice or indeed the ear of the most powerful at this point.

Without the money from the Court Challenges Program, the vast majority of Canadian women are struck speechless in the fight for equality. That is what it means; women have been muffled and silenced in their fight for equality.

Must we, therefore, as the Minister for Multiculturalism and Citizenship said, rely on the provinces to defend and promote our constitutional rights? He must have overlooked the fact that in the financial arena, again many of the provinces, my province for one, are particularly hard pressed and unable to grant to their citizens the kind of funding that has long been within the responsibility of the federal government to grant. What the federal government is doing here is abrogating its responsibility and denying that it has historically and constitutionally been the repository as the guardian of rights.

This is a national tragedy.

The Court Challenges Program was important to the advancement and the outcome of a number of significant equality cases. The Andrews case is one I could cite. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the main purpose of the equality rights section of the charter was to benefit those who have been historically disadvantaged. Surely, surely, there is no one in this House—well, almost no one—to whom I have to explain the historical disadvantages suffered by women. We could probably start back in the garden of Eden when Eve took the rap for Adam's original sin.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Ms. Clancy: Yes, indeed; yes, indeed. I am prepared to argue the theology and I am quite certain that my colleague from the New Democratic Party and my colleague, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, would agree with me. If the rest of you theological—well, I was going to say theological illiterates, but I am sure my colleagues would agree that that