

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, April 6, 1990

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S. O. 81—FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S CENTRES

Ms. Lynn Hunter (Saanich—Gulf Islands) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should reinstate core funding for women's centres, to enable those centres to continue to provide essential information, referral and support services to women.

She said: Madam Speaker, this is a very important motion on a very important issue. The devastation to women's centres by this latest budget cut really speaks to not only a lack of fiscal support for women's centres but a concerted political effort on the part of this government to silence the voice of dissent of women across Canada.

Women's centres grew out of the recommendations of the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women. That royal commission spoke of the real inequality that women faced in our country. The recommendations of the royal commission were being implemented gradually, painfully slowly, across Canada. Women's centres were playing a significant role in this process.

Women's centres are necessary. Some of the services that they provide include services for battered women who do not know where to turn, where the nearest shelter is, or how to get there, or even which lawyers they would best talk to. Women's centres provide that information and sometimes they are adjacent to the very services which a battered woman would require.

Teenage women get information regarding sexuality or sexually transmitted diseases and the location of supportive health centres. Women's centres provide that information. There are homeless women right here in Ottawa. The Women's Place in Ottawa has operated as a drop-in centre for homeless women on weekends because there was a gap in social services provided by municipal and other services.

The centres can tell jobless women, newly divorced women, young women, or older women who may not know where to start looking for a job what job programs are available for them and can provide counselling.

Centres inform mothers and parents what child care facilities are available in a community; they advise immigrant and visible minority women what programs are available to them, what organizations can help them.

Women's centres can help sexually harassed women and those who are discriminated against at work, by telling them what the law says, and explaining their rights. Many have a list of lawyers who can help them.

All women and men in a community can use the resources of a women's centre. They provide public information and public education on women's issues. They speak out on matters affecting women.

With these latest cuts, 100 per cent of their core funding, these services are going to be at least drastically reduced if not eliminated completely in some cases. That is going to have a very negative impact for the kind of work we have tried to do over the years to implement the recommendations of that Royal commission report.

For example, in Whitehorse, cuts to women's and to native organizations' funding means a cut to 80 per cent of the voluntary organizations in the Yukon. This is a pattern that has evolved over time.

The Secretary of State's women's program was cut in the 1989-90 budget by \$2 million. In the last budget it was cut by a further \$1.6 million.