• (1810)

By abolishing this program, the government is removing a unique mechanism that could be used by groups to defend their rights. It was also a relatively low cost program, if we consider that during the past seven years, the government, which was committed to spending over $8 million, only spent $4.9 million.

If we compare this cut with increases or allocations in other areas, it is a sad reflection on the government's value judgments. What about the $4 million for the Museum of Humour, the $28 million that was spent on the Spicer commission, whose report is gathering dust somewhere on a shelf in some department and has never been heard of since; and more than $20 million for the Beaudoin–Dobbie committee, whose recommendations the government has yet to endorse.

At least this was a relatively lost cost program that provided a guarantee for all Canadians that their rights would be respected and the democratic process would remain intact.

The government has acknowledged in many ways that this was a very valid and useful program, since more than 300 cases have been heard so far. Assuming that the program served us well for 14 years, why would it no longer be useful today? We on this side of the House wonder about this, because one gets the impression that the government is anxious to muzzle individuals and groups that favour equality for all Canadians.

To get back to the 300 cases that were heard by various courts across Canada, and I would refer to *Hansard* of March 17 this year, when the minister of multiculturalism said, in response to a question from the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier, and I quote:

> This program was very beneficial, but after nearly 300 cases, according to my information, we have now created a certain body of jurisprudence.

I think we can assume that there will certainly be other cases that will be different from those that have already been heard by the courts and which deserve special attention, since they will also be useful in clarifying various sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Speaking of the charter, perhaps I may make a very modest comment, since I am neither a lawyer nor a constitutional expert. The charter has already lost much of its impact, in my humble opinion, because of the notwithstanding clause. If we lose the Court Challenges Program as well, I wonder how the economically and otherwise disadvantaged in this country will manage to obtain official recognition of their rights?

Which leads me to say that those same groups, individuals and minorities would be in double jeopardy. They can no longer depend on this last resort in their quest for recognition of their rights. Where do they stand legally? The charter does not guarantee access to the courts for people who want to challenge laws that prevent them from exercising their rights. It was a very valuable program, a far–reaching program. It was somehow a haven for those who thought that their rights had been trampled.

If you compare this program to the charter, I believe that there is a significant difference for the reasons I have just mentionned.

I see that my time is nearly up. I would like to conclude by asking the government, in view of the modest costs involved and of the program's impact on the lives of all Canadians, to restore this program for the well–being of all parties concerned.

It would be more than unfortunate, even deplorable, if only one Canadian had his rights denied because he could not afford to defend himself. It woud be a shame.

One must always remember that what makes justice meaningful also gives meaning to a person's freedom and dignity.

[*English*]

Mr. Ian Waddell (Port Moody—Coquitlam): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member.

I would like to read a paragraph from a letter I received from la Fédération des Franco–Colombiens in Vancouver. As a matter of fact its office is in the riding of the Minister of Justice, Vancouver Centre.

I wonder if the hon. member would comment on this statement and tell me whether he agrees or disagrees. The letter says of the cancellation of the Court Challenges Program: "Nor could the decision have come at a worse moment, smack in the middle of the constitutional negotiations. Unless Canadians are enabled to appeal to the courts to have their rights respected, constitutional guarantees of linguistic duality are so much hot air. It clearly allows that the decision threatens the very principle of linguistic duality, that fundamental characteristic