

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTION PERIOD***[English]*

Cuts to the National Association of Cultural Education Centres will affect the operations of the national organization and its 72 centres across Canada. One of the centres hardest hit is the one in Saskatchewan which serves all First Nations people in my province from its office in Saskatoon.

• (1415)

The First Nations cultural program has been serving aboriginal people since 1972. It began because of the recognition that culture is an integral part of learning. This is so important that the national association is promoting legislation that would protect and safeguard the cultural interests of First Nations people.

I support this important and decentralized initiative which delivers programs dealing with culture, language, history and heritage to people at the local level. I condemn the federal government for cutting the funding which makes this possible.

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ELIZABETH FRY WEEK

Ms. Mary Clancy (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies is a federation of 21 community based groups dedicated to the provision of programs and services to women in the criminal justice system.

At the national level the society works toward long-term law reform and social change. It is also committed to providing increased opportunities for federally sentenced women to speak so that their voices are not silenced.

The majority of women in conflict with the law has experienced various forms of violence: physical, psychological and/or sexual. Many have experienced racism and poverty. This violence is perpetuated by a system which all too often works against the needs of women. The separation from family and inadequate legal representation are but two examples. The result is further disempowerment of women and lack of healing.

The aim of Elizabeth Fry Week is to raise public awareness of the situation of women in the criminal justice system. Greater awareness will in turn encourage greater exploration of alternative ideas to end the cycles of violence which further victimize women involved in the criminal justice system.

We salute Elizabeth Fry Week.

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

[Translation]

But before doing that, I would like to join the hon. member for Saint-Denis who noted with satisfaction, like all members of this House, that the Premier of Quebec has largely won his big battle with cancer.

[English]

We have learned today that Statistics Canada has confirmed that for all families in Canada income has gone down 4.8 per cent since 1989.

Last week the Minister of Finance painted a rosy picture of the future, but I would like to know from him when they will come forth with some policies that will give the middle class of Canada a break. Over the last four years, because of the wrong economic policies of this government, those who are working very hard to make a living in Canada have lost substantially. When will this government introduce some real policies that will give some hope to hard-working Canadians?

Hon. Don Mazankowski (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows we have been in a world-wide recession which Canada has not escaped. It has certainly taken its toll on the economy and on a number of individual Canadians.

I remind the hon. member that during the 1981-82 recession when he was in government family income fell by about 6 per cent. This is not an unusual occurrence but, as is noted in the Statistics Canada release, government cash transfers to individual families have increased from 7.9 per cent in 1980 to 12 per cent in 1991 which means, for example, that low income families with the lowest average income in 1991 saw their incomes rise from \$5,535 to \$16,316.

I should say as well that in the 1992 budget we put in place a child benefit program which is providing some \$2.1 billion in family assistance over a five-year period to low and middle income families. As well, I did provide a reduction in personal income tax. The combination of