

*Supply*

It is citizens, human beings, who build nations and civilizations, not governments. However my department, the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship will continue through all of its programs to support this crucial human endeavour.

Times are what they are. There is no escaping current realities. This government cannot simply evade or blindly shirk its fiscal responsibilities.

The economic climate in Canada today is very tough. It is tough everywhere and it requires equally tough responses, decisions that will not and cannot always be popular or welcomed.

Our resources are finite. Our resources are stretched. Everyone knows that. With the resources that are available, we must prioritize. We must make hard choices. Across Canada today everyone is being forced to make hard choices.

Now it is true that the Court Challenges Program was never intended to provide perpetual access to minority and equality groups seeking to challenge federal legislation in the courts or to underwrite their efforts.

It is true that the role and activities of such groups is often already supported by existing government programming including the women's program, the disabled participation program and by a host of other initiatives, not only in the Department of Secretary of State, but also in the other departments.

There are initiatives designed to combat racism and discrimination and to promote official languages and equality rights. That is the centrality and the importance of why we established a full Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship to make certain that equality was there in fact and not only in law, the equal opportunity to participate fully for all of our citizens.

It is true that these other programs will continue to be funded by this government and encouraged and actively promoted. Some elements of the Court Challenges Program, some research and public education may still be eligible for federal funding.

All commitments of court cases made before the budget's main estimates which were handed down on February 27 will be honoured and processed at the level of court at which they were approved.

It is equally true that not all remedies to all wrongs need to be addressed or resolved in the halls of justice.

*[Translation]*

It is true that after taking nearly 300 cases to court, some of which will continue to be heard while the program is phased out, we now have a body of precedents in the field of official languages and equality rights.

*[English]*

All of those propositions are undoubtedly true. So where exactly does that leave us? It leaves us with a proposal by my hon. colleague that however well-intentioned, it is simply not realistic. I salute his purpose but I cannot endorse his motion.

Perhaps now is the time for the provinces to begin to play a role. Perhaps it is time for the Canadian Bar Association or for other legal organizations and social agencies, non-governmental bodies and institutions to step forward.

With the letters of support the member has been able to receive, I have no doubt that there may be a body or group of people very well prepared and interested in continuing to carry on the work in a shared or some other relationship.

What a wonderful opportunity we have today. I thank the member again for placing this important question before the House. We have the opportunity today to actually do some brainstorming and some thinking as members of Parliament, to examine what possible method can be found.

We certainly all recognize the benefit and the excellence of the program that had been in place. It is clear we cannot go backward. We cannot undo what has been done.

• (1610)

We have decided that this program has made its contribution. On this decision, there is no turning back. But surely we have it in our collective powers of creativity and imagination to find another way, one not necessarily funded by the federal government.

In this spirit, I invite hon. members of this House to devote a significant portion of this debate to exploring some of those possibilities today.

I look forward to being able to listen with great anticipation to all of the innovative and creative ideas that members have been hearing from their constituents. I hope in that spirit we can begin to construct something