

[*Translation*]

We thus ensured that decisions on funding—what cases to choose as precedents, what groups or individuals to finance, what amounts to pay—would be made as they should always have been made, completely independently, without government interference. The evaluation of applications for financial assistance was entrusted to independent boards established by the council.

• (1600)

[*English*]

When the program was renewed for another five years in 1990 administration was transferred to the Human Rights Research and Education Centre located at the University of Ottawa. During these years funds were committed not only to bring test challenges to court but also to conduct research and impact studies, to launch interventions and to monitor case developments.

In fact, in the years since 1985, some \$8.5 million was allocated to groups or individuals seeking to clarify the language and equality provisions of the charter.

Since its inception in 1978, some 264 have been granted funding by the program, 99 involving language rights and 165 involving equality rights. Many of these were landmark cases.

Consider for example *Bilodeau v. The Attorney General of Manitoba* in which the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Government of Manitoba should be required to translate into French all of the laws it has passed in the English language only. All of us understand the importance of this case in the defence of francophone rights.

Or consider the *Canadian Disability Rights Council v. Canada* in which the trial division of the Federal Court declared unconstitutional and without force or effect and in violation of section 3 of the charter, a provision in the *Canada Elections Act* that for many years had deprived Canadians with a mental disability of the right to vote.

Consider too the case of *Canada Employment and Immigration Commission v. Tétreault-Gaboury* in which the Supreme Court ruled section 31 of the *Unemploy-*

Supply

ment Insurance Act inconsistent with section 15 of the charter.

The effect of section 31 was to remove applicants age 65 or older from the normal benefit plan and to provide them with a single lump sum retirement benefit amounting to three times the weekly rate to which they would otherwise be entitled.

[*Translation*]

And the list goes on. I am thinking, for example, of the Ford case in Quebec, the *Mercure* case in Saskatchewan and the *Mahé* case in Alberta. All these important decisions were made as a result of challenges financed by the program.

[*English*]

These, of course, are only a few of the 68 significant and historic decisions rendered by the courts between 1978 and March 1991 as a direct result of the funding provided by the Court Challenges Program.

During those years this program enabled the legal system to adjudicate an extremely broad range of human rights issues, including the rights of prisoners, aboriginal Canadians and the disabled, and discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, race, ethnic origin, marital and economic status.

In giving voice to this motion, my hon. colleague from Ottawa—Vanier is essentially recognizing the importance the Court Challenges Program has made in the fight for equality, equality of race, equality of gender, equality of language and equality of access.

These values lie at the very core of the department it is my privilege to administer. Let me say frankly that one must always guard against the impulse of complacency and acknowledge that there is more to be done.

Nevertheless, let me say that I am proud of the progress we have made on any number of fronts to bring Canadians of all cultures and origins into the very centre of life in Canada. It opens up the country to their talent and energy, their ingenuity and creativity. It helps to break down the barriers that have been constructed, to assist persons with disabilities to have full and equal access to mainstream society, to wage war on our most implacable enemies, racism, bigotry, discrimination and illiteracy.