

*Supply*

problem is poverty I can't think of anything better to throw at it than money".

The member spoke about women's right to social programs. We have to address in this country why we look at social programs as a woman's right. The fact is that we look at social programs as a right of women and children because it is women and children who are poor in our society. It starts from the time they are young and continues until they are old. Two-thirds of the elderly poor in this country are women. The vast majority of the working poor in this country are women. The vast majority of single parent women are poor.

We are here to talk about the budget. The budget more than any other document or bill or piece of business that comes before this House is a statement of a country's and a government's priorities.

It is a statement of its commitment to the equitable distribution of the resources that we pool as a society, to the benefit of all Canadians.

I want to address how this budget stacks up when it comes to a fair and equitable share of public spending in this country for women.

My colleague from Halifax has put forward a motion that condemns the government for its disregard for the fundamental rights of Canadian women, especially as expressed in this budget.

This debate has several dimensions and I am going to start first with those aspects of the budget that go directly to the issue of human rights. This budget is bad news for human rights, and bad news for human rights is bad news for women.

This budget, more than anything I have seen come before this House, is a direct attack on the very commitment of Canadians to human rights through their government and all the institutions that protect those human rights.

It has been 15 years since the first Human Rights Act was passed, 10 years since the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was passed and 5 years since the Employment Equity Act was passed, yet women and other groups in our society still do not enjoy full equality. This budget is a concerted attack on their efforts to ever enjoy full equality.

Under the Canadian Human Rights Act, the role of the Human Rights Commission is to make sure that government policies and programs conform with equality and human rights. If that commission rules that 70,000 women working for the Public Service of Canada are entitled to pay equity, this government will not pay it. This government will ignore the Human Rights Commission. Not only that, but this government will use Parliament to pass a new law so it does not have to respect the human rights of women.

The lack of pay equity is one of the main contributors to the poverty of women.

Second, the government has said it is not going to listen to what the Supreme Court of Canada says when it comes to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Right now the government primarily discriminates against women based on whether they are married or single in terms of their entitlement to a spousal allowance between the ages of 60 and 64. That case is now before the courts.

The government has said, even though the Supreme Court may find that this legislation discriminates on the basis of marital status, it is not going to implement a decision of the Supreme Court. It is going to change the laws so it does not have to pay attention to the Supreme Court on people's equality rights. That same decision no doubt will be applied if the government wishes to choose to ignore the Supreme Court, if it rules in favour of divorced and separated spouses, in the case of arguing for equal entitlement to pensions from the pensioners to whom they were married for most of the time the pension asset was being built up by that pensioner.

The third thing the government has said is that it is cancelling the Court Challenges Program.

As I said, it is a decade since we have had a Charter of Rights and Freedoms in this country, and yet most of the cases that have come to courts have served to work against equality for women and other disadvantaged groups. The only way women and others protected by the charter have been able to put forward their rights under the charter through the courts is through the Court Challenges Program. As my friends on the other side acknowledge, in our society women are poorer than men. They do not have the money to go to court and defend their rights.