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STATUS OF WOMEN

Funding for Women's Organizations

Questions by:

The Honourable Claudette Tardif

Thursday, May 6, 2010

THE SENATE

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FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Hon. Claudette Tardif (Deputy Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, one of the 22 women's groups cut was Womanspace, a Lethbridge organization helping women in crisis over the last 25 years. This organization will likely have to close its doors this summer, after it was denied a grant from the federal government. Workers there indicate that there is no other place that they can direct their clients. This issue is of particular concern, since all the social agencies in that city refer clients to Womanspace.

Can the leader tell us why the government would cut such an important and vital organization contributing to the empowerment of hundreds of women, including Aboriginal women?

Hon. Marjory LeBreton (Leader of the Government): First of all, the honourable senator used an improper word when she said "cut."

Groups apply for funding through Status of Women Canada — or other agencies of government. Obviously some groups have been successful, year after year. Other groups have been denied the opportunity to have funds.

I reported on Tuesday that Status of Women Canada has increased its budget and has accepted applications from groups that had never been funded before. When a group in a particular community is denied government funding, I know it is hard for them to then look elsewhere. They become so reliant on government program funding that they think it is theirs forever and a day. They do not care about any other organization that may want to access funding, but only that theirs continues.

Senator Losier-Cool asked about another organization on Tuesday. These groups all apply for funding. There is a criteria followed. I do not have the details, but they might have put in a proposal that did not meet the criteria. That does not mean that the government is turning its back on funding women's programs.

I said a moment ago that new funding with the increased money under the Women's Program will go, in part, to new

organizations that apply for funding and receive money for the first time, and 40 per cent of those groups are charged with programs to end violence against women.

[Translation]

Senator Tardif: Honourable senators, Status of Women Canada no longer subsidizes research and advocacy, the Court Challenges Program has been abolished and true pay equity is being denied, yet again, with a vote in the other place.

Now, wonderful organizations and associations such as Womanspace and 22 other associations have had their grants cut. I will ask the question again: Why has Status of Women Canada's mandate undergone this ideological change?

[English]

Senator LeBreton: Honourable senators, it has nothing to do with ideological change. The fact is that Status of Women Canada, under our government, has increased the funding to women's groups.

• (1430)

As I mentioned recently, many women's organizations feel that if they make an application to the government, they deserve to be considered, and not have the money go to the same groups year after year. Many groups that have applied for funding have been funded for years, and continue to be funded. We want to ensure that we touch on groups that have never been funded before, groups that are bringing forward innovative ideas. We also want to support groups that have already contributed great work across the country. For that reason, some groups are receiving funds again.

The bottom line, honourable senators, is that it is impossible for the government — and I do not care which government it is, the previous government or this government — to fund everyone. Decisions must be made by Status of Women Canada officials. They work with a set of criteria. Many women's organizations in the country are happy this year because, for the first time ever, the government has listened and has funded their programs.