Your editorial Time for a Debate on Employment Equity—argues that "Canadians who oppose affirmative action must fight it through the ordinary political process".

But there is a more effective way to fight affirmative action. Those who oppose it should simply indicate on their workforce surveys that they belong to all of the designated groups. If even 10 per cent of those who oppose affirmative action were to do so, then virtually every workforce would be found to be adequately represented for employment equity purposes. This would release employers from the obligation to meet quotas, allowing them to hire the most competent applicants regardless of biology.

Current legislation does not define membership in the designated groups—indeed, membership is mostly subjective. Employers are obligated to accept employees' and applicants' self-identification as being correct. Moreover, workplace surveys are meant to be confidential, and Canadian human rights legislation prohibits employers from requiring employees or job candidates to prove their biological status. So sabotaging the employment equity bureaucracy in the way suggested is arguably not illegal and is certainly without risk to either employees or employers.

Thus the problems associated with a statistical base such as voluntary self–identification cannot be resolved. Therefore the whole basis and foundation for employment equity is seriously flawed and this certainly illustrates it.

The Reform Party believes in the true equality of all Canadians regardless of their personal characteristics. Public opposition to the bill is seen in the upcoming Ontario election where two old line parties have moved closer to our position on the issue.

The government would like us to believe that affirmative action, as it would have it, would eliminate barriers and combat a broad based disadvantage to certain groups. However, I believe that legislative quota programs like employment equity actually confer benefits or impose disabilities because of race and formally divide people into racial definitions and racial mindsets.

• (1550)

Some of the strongest opponents I have heard regarding the legislation have been those familiar with the realities of similar programs elsewhere, such as in South Africa.

Legislated employment equity suggests to everyone, including the individual involved, that the reason they got the job was their race or disability and not their ability or aptitude. Thus this kind of legislation cheapens the accomplishments and efforts of individuals. It degrades individuals by conferring on them a definition of victimhood. It separates Canadians into competing subgroups while putting unnecessary burdens on our national economy and on our good business practice sense.

We have a history of chequered motives and subversive citizenship. We have a program that is based on flawed assumptions of systemic discrimination. We have a denial of a basic principle of merit with the introduction of quotas and numerical goals and coercion and government interference through reports, fines and intrusive government practices.

Our position as a country will best be served in the global economy by market demands in the places of employment. Our future and unity as a country will be best assured by ensuring true equality of Canadians, not by job quotas but by the equality of the personhood and the real abilities of all Canadians.

In summary, employment equity is seriously flawed and conceptually flawed in practice. I encourage Canadians to express their views on employment equity and Bill C–64 with which Parliament is currently dealing.

Mr. Rey D. Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first by way of comment, with respect to the witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons, let it be recorded that a list was submitted by the Reform Party and many people on the list declined the invitation to appear before the committee. It was no fault of the committee.

Second, even at the last minute some witnesses cancelled out. That again was beyond the control of the committee studying the employment equity bill.

Third, the member said on the steering committee that we would look at this in committee of the whole. To now fret over it after the fact I leave to the imagination of the House.

The member said equality of opportunities may not necessarily lead to equality of results. That is right. However she failed to ask the question: What if the cost of the inability to lead to equality of results is systemic discrimination? Would the member agree that the best approach would not be on an individual case by case basis but a systemic approach such as legislation and policy initiatives of government?

The member kept on referring to preferential hiring. This is the myth one perpetuates if one would like one's political agenda to win, but it is not being honest with Canadians. To say that it should only be based on the principle of merit and qualifications as though people in designated groups, women, visible minorities, persons with disabilities and First Nations people have no qualifications and no merit.

Studies have shown that they have been discriminated against for decades. Why would the member continue to insist that numerical goals are the same as quotas? The bill before the Chamber states in subclause 30(1):

No compliance officer may give a direction under section 23 and no Tribunal may make an order under section 27 where that direction or order

(e) would impose a quota on an employer.