

*Routine Proceedings*

It is in this manner that the government has responded to the standing committee report *A Consensus for Action*, not on behalf of some Canadians, but on behalf of all Canadians and not least the disabled themselves.

**Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the hon. member for Beaches—Woodbine for moving concurrence in the second report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons. This is an issue which should be non-partisan. By this I mean that all members should support the idea of a better way of life for those Canadians who are physically challenged.

I would like to preface my remarks with a brief history of our committee and how we come to this debate today.

In 1981 the report *Obstacles* was issued by the Special Committee on the Status of the Disabled, the first study of its kind in Canada. It was considered to be the most comprehensive study of this issue ever conducted by a parliamentary body. *Obstacles* made 130 recommendations dealing with a wide range of issues from legal, to social, to economic.

The government of the day took action on or gave active consideration to virtually all of the 130 recommendations.

In 1985 a subcommittee on equal rights of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs conducted a study which led to the recommendations on access to federal buildings and employment in the Public Service and federally regulated corporations. In the government's response *Towards Equity*, the government cited that it had recently established the Disabled Persons Secretariat under Secretary of State and passed a piece of legislation now known as the Employment Equity Act as initiatives which would better the community.

Finally, in 1987 the government was persuaded to establish a standing committee to deal exclusively with the issue of the status of the disabled. At that time the hon. Deputy Prime Minister committed that his government would increase employment of persons who were disabled in the Public Service to 3.3 per cent and allot \$15 million and 400 person-hours to achieve this goal, an initiative which unfortunately Canadians are still awaiting.

In 1988 the new standing committee issued its first report known as *No News is Bad News*. The committee stated that persons with disabilities were finding it difficult to access information. It recommended that the government act to make publications available in other than print media and to amend the Broadcasting Act.

The second report of this committee is what we hope to concur in today. Each member of this House has some area of responsibility, whether they be a minister of the Crown, a parliamentary secretary to a minister or a critic of a certain portfolio. Unlike most portfolios, however, the Status of the Disabled deals with several ministries and overlaps many departments including Communications, Transport, Employment and Immigration, Health and Welfare, and the Human Rights Commission. I could go on to argue that all ministries touch this issue in some way.

The point is that with all these areas to consider, one would think that consensus would be next to impossible to achieve. Through the political will of committee members, consensus was achieved through the very report which we now debate.

Before committee members reached this consensus they had to ask themselves how parliamentarians could best serve the disabled community. The first and most important step is economic integration. It has often been said that the best social program is a job. With it come pride of achievement, a sense of purpose, and the ability to provide for oneself and family. No individual wants to be dependent on the state, so why implement programs that create disincentives to work?

Given the great number of barriers to the disabled, the Employment Equity Act was a step in the right direction. Although in theory it is a responsible initiative, in practice the current act needs tightening. As this act is scheduled for mandatory review in 1991, I would take this opportunity to urge the Minister of Employment and Immigration to establish this review as soon as possible after the new year.

How can we best achieve economic integration? The committee report sets out the basic steps to begin this long overdue process. While we should recognize that this report does not provide the ultimate solution, we must also consider that the road before us is long. A journey of a thousand miles begins with just one step.