

*Government Orders*

The Treasury Board has issued a publication called "Alternative Formats Access for All". It provides guidance on how to produce material in alternate formats for persons with disabilities. An alternate format might be large type on a page or a cassette recording of printed material. The alternate format not only helps public servants but at the same time better serves the public.

The Treasury Board has also published a series of best practices as well as guides to assist public service managers to implement employment equity. Two most recent best practices that have been published deal with women and persons with disabilities. Both draw on practices that have proven effective in a range of organizations across the country.

Also we have just printed guides concerning the management of employees with psychiatric and developmental difficulties. We have also produced guides with respect to retention of aboriginal employees.

To ensure that employment equity is implemented effectively, departments and agencies must prepare an employment equity plan with goals and timetables. These are not quotas but goals they will strive to achieve. However the merit principle still prevails.

The plans are public documents as are the reports on what has been achieved under them. The plans will not be effective unless they build on the advice that the diversity of employees can provide. Some of this advice is provided by consultation groups reporting to the Treasury Board but much of it comes from advisory committees set up within departments.

The views of the public service unions are also important. I want to acknowledge the spirit of co-operation that inspires public service unions on employment equity matters. We are mindful of the need for continued collaboration with them. We are confident the provisions of the legislation will bear fruit.

We have established the framework to help the advancement of employment equity in the public service of the nineties. The framework places employment equity firmly within the practice of good human resources management and business planning. The legislation in front of us will continue to provide a solid legal foundation. It is not a radical break from the past; it is indeed a bridge to the future.

It is important to remember that although we tend to speak of diversity in terms of groups the focus is actually on the individual. It is not the group that is recruited as a filing clerk or that is considered for promotion to executive ranks. It is one particular person. Can anyone object to the need to reach out to all members of society based on their individual qualifications and merits? Some people would argue that employment equity encourages candidate selection to be made on the basis of sex or ethnic origin or a disability rather than merit. I beg to differ.

As a matter of fact the essential point is that appointments to the public service are governed by the Public Service Employment Act which enshrines the merit principle. It is far different from the kind of legislation that was talked about earlier by the member for Beaver River with respect to the province of Ontario. Our act enshrines the merit principle. The administration of the act rests with the Public Service Commission, an independent agency that reports directly to Parliament.

Progress in the area of employment equity has been made in full respect of merit. It is the principle on which a non-partisan, highly professional public service has been built. This cornerstone of human resource management will not be eroded.

• (1335)

Employment equity is not about preferences. It is a method of creating a fairness that might not otherwise exist. Several years ago the Conference Board of Canada issued an interesting paper on employment equity. The introduction revealed that women, visible minorities and persons with disabilities make up close to 60 per cent of the new entrants into Canada's labour force. It then went on to say that the full participation of these entrants to Canada's labour force constitutes a vital resource and that their full participation in the workplace will be fundamental to the ability of organizations to understand and respond to the needs of the rapidly changing marketplace. That is what the conference board said.

To achieve this goal organizations need solid policies and fair practices. For example, the same board found that if we want to attract minorities it is a good idea to advertise job openings outside the mainstream media and put them into the ethnic media. The conference board finding related to culture was of significance because organizations which implement interviewer training considered it a particularly effective measure in raising employment levels for designated groups.

I have made it clear that employment equity is not about introducing discrimination. It is not about reverse discrimination in the workplace. Rather, employment equity is about providing opportunities by removing barriers and establishing policies and programs to address the needs of designated member groups.

[Translation]

Employment equity is about including everyone, not excluding certain individuals.

[English]

No one should be excluded from access to employment opportunities for reasons unrelated to competence, for reasons unrelated to ability. That is what Bill C-64 is all about and that is why I stand to support it today.