

Government Orders

he gets, except he is not rolling it anywhere, except into the trough for a very large pension because we are about the same age. I get \$16,000 back, which I will have to pay tax on at 46 per cent, which is my tax bracket.

• (1325)

There it is. If it were a hundred grand I would love it, and I would do what I could with it, but because I have opted out of that pension plan, I will be exempt. I know I will certainly sleep with a clear conscience, knowing that at least I am not ripping the taxpayer off for that much money.

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise as a co-sponsor of this piece of legislation, in so far as it relates to the federal employees, the Public Service of Canada.

Let me first of all express my gratitude to my colleague, the Minister of Human Resources Development, for bringing forward this legislation, bringing the private and public sector together under one piece of legislation, and for members on the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons for their significant contribution to the debate.

[Translation]

The committee's main report reflects the collective wisdom of those who testified.

[English]

Together they described employment equity as a sensible and balanced measure that strengthens our social fabric.

Canadians have an excellent understanding of what equality is all about. They appreciate that for there to be a harmonious and well-balanced society, all of its members must have an opportunity to contribute to it as well as share in its benefits. That is what employment equity and this legislation are all about.

Employment equity has been criticized, we have heard it in just the last few minutes, on the grounds that it introduces discrimination into the workplace. In fact, the opposite is true. Employment equity helps individuals compete for employment on an equal basis. Nobody receives special advantages, nobody receives special privileges under this legislation. To claim that anyone does represents a serious misunderstanding of the principles involved in Bill C-64.

Employment equity simply seeks a diversity in the workplace similar to what can be found in society. Therefore, we must remove barriers to employment opportunities to better reflect the population as it is today. These barriers are frequently buried in systems and longstanding practices.

For example, if for no particular good reason except tradition all police officers must be six feet tall, then most women could not compete. This sort of systemic barrier was once commonplace in this country, yet there would be few today who would argue that it makes much sense now, if in fact it ever did.

Let me give another example, rather less obvious perhaps. If a recruitment or promotion board were composed of three people, all males, all graduates of the same university, and all about the same age, one could be forgiven for wondering if this board would be much open to the perspectives of persons with different values, different experiences, different traditions. Selection boards require greater diversity to ensure that no candidate's talents are overlooked.

We must take measures to encourage equitable access to opportunities for employment and opportunities for advancement in the public service. This may mean, for instance, establishing training positions, so that those who are disadvantaged can develop skills and acquire experience to compete on an equal footing. When we make full use of all available human capital, then our society will truly benefit.

[Translation]

The face of Canadian workers has changed.

[English]

It has changed dramatically. Women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and people in a visible minority now represent the largest share of new entrants to the labour market. In just 10 years the representation of women in the labour force has risen from 40 per cent to 45 per cent. This 5 per cent shift represents some 750,000 women. Employment equity helps the labour market adapt to changes of this magnitude.

• (1330)

It might be helpful to speak in more concrete terms about creating an environment that takes advantage of diversity. The Public Service of Canada is a good example. Diversity within the workforce means more than just having people of different backgrounds working together. It is not enough to hire an employee with a disability without helping to build the employee's relationships with his or her colleagues. It is not acceptable to ignore the support and training that women need to advance within an organization. Diversity within an organization calls for the acknowledgement and accommodation of differences.