

*Private Members' Business*

ence difficulties in life but Canadians with disabilities are often faced with additional hurdles. We have the power to remove these hurdles and we are committed to removing them.

Governments, industry, community groups and disabled persons' organizations will continue to work together to enable people with disabilities to fully enjoy their rights as citizens. Considerable progress has been made, but there is still much to be done. Together we will do it. We are very pleased to support the motion.

**Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North):** I am certainly delighted to speak to this Motion 526:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should take steps to convince the provinces and municipalities to encourage owners of reception halls to provide washrooms on the same floor as the reception facility for the use of the handicapped and the elderly.

The motion sounds very simple in its request but is very profound in its implications. I congratulate my Liberal colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Leonard for introducing this motion. This is a very important initiative for it addresses a very important group in our society.

Thirteen to fourteen per cent of Canadians do not enjoy the same kind of mobility that most citizens are blessed with. Our society has been designed for the able-bodied.

*The Ottawa Citizen* recently reported on a project called "Trying on Disability". The project was aimed to raise awareness of what it is like to live in a world built for people who have no trouble getting around. Volunteers in the project who were sent to do their grocery shopping wore yellow swimming goggles with black specks on the glass to see how it felt to have cataracts. They wore slippery surgery gloves on their hands and put diving weights on their arms and legs to experience arthritis. They wore ear plugs to learn what it was like to be hearing impaired.

The reporter, Mr. Jeff Heinrich, wrote on their vivid and revealing experience, and I quote:

We may look have looked comical, but our impersonations were deadly serious — and what we got was a vision of ourselves in old age, a sobering vision of a difficult life deprived of our basic senses and skills.

• (1720)

The project illustrated a significant point. Many of our senior citizens face a lot of problems doing ordinary things in our fast-paced society.

It is clear that our population is growing older. It is also clear that we are going to have to take a good look at how we are servicing our senior citizens. I believe that our disabled elderly citizens face too many barriers in our society, and are denied access to essential services and amenities of life.

One important place where disabled seniors face problems is at recreation halls that do not have washroom facilities on the same floor as the reception facility. Seniors who have arthritis in their knees see the stairway as a daunting hurdle. Eventually, these seniors will avoid going to places where they have to climb up the stairs to access the washroom facilities. This means the elderly will miss out on important social and recreational activities.

This is simply unfair. Why should they, in effect, be denied access to a building only because of their disability? Our Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees each of us freedom of movement, freedom of association and many other freedoms that are infringed upon when disabled people cannot attend functions in reception halls that do not have accessible washrooms.

In total, there are 3.2 million disabled people in our country, people who have reduced basic senses and skills. This statistic includes young people who do not have the use of most of their bodies, but who are able to get around in wheelchairs. Again, one of the problems is the stairs.

Reception halls must be equipped with elevators or ramps in order for a person in a wheelchair to get from one floor to the next with dignity and without having to suffer the inconvenience and embarrassment of having to ask others to lift them up and down the stairs.

Disabled people have the same rights as able-bodied people do. They should be able to attend the same functions as we able-bodied can. We should, therefore, strive to encourage that all buildings be made accessible to them by having, at the very least, wheelchair accessible washrooms on every floor.