

*Private Members' Business*

zens. That same year, the Secretary of State was designated Minister responsible for the Status of the Disabled.

In 1986 the Employment Equity Act was adopted, obliging federally regulated employers to file reports on the measures they take to recruit disabled persons. The following year, the government proclaimed a national access week for the disabled, urging municipalities to improve access levels in transportation, the work place, recreation facilities, education and housing.

Between 1988 and 1991 the government pursued its initiatives with federal-provincial agreements on social housing, a policy ensuring that properties purchased or leased by the government include no physical barriers, and the start of a complete review of federal statutes affecting the disabled, to name only a few of these projects.

I am not trying to make the government look good. I simply want to make it clear that we have made progress and, above all, that we have paved the way for future action. We realize that being disabled does not in any way diminish a person's value or, and this is very important, the contribution that person can make to society.

We understood that political action and legislation to change the system would be effective only if we were able to change attitudes. In the past year, much has been done to implement the government's commitment on this issue.

First, in the fall of 1991 the government launched its National Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities, a five-year project co-ordinated by the Department of the Secretary of State and involving ten federal departments and agencies. The strategy, which is meant to ensure equal access for the disabled, their integration into economic life and full participation in society, appeals to the spirit of partnership and calls on all levels of government to take part.

Since last fall, several departments and agencies have begun to make changes, many in close co-operation with the provinces and territories.

For example, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) set up a program of financial assistance for disabled and low-income seniors who wish to make minor changes to their home. Several provinces

and territories have agreed to participate in the program, which will start in July.

The Department of Fitness and Amateur Sport provides another excellent example of partnership. To ensure the commitment and support of the whole community, the department decided to share information on its program with all prospective partners. Fitness Canada thus held information meetings with representatives of the provincial and territorial governments and the voluntary and private sectors. Meetings were held in every province and territory between December 1991 and February 1992, and the results of these meetings are now being distributed to all participants.

Fitness Canada has also shown initiative in the field of education. Working in close co-operation with nine sports organizations and recreation centres for the disabled, the department is developing educational material to help teachers better integrate handicapped students in their physical education classes. In March, it established a steering committee to liaise with the Department of Education in every province.

Finally, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development as well is always consulting with the provinces and territories. In the province of my distinguished colleague, Saskatchewan, for example, the provincial departments and organizations that provide services to the disabled participated in information meetings culminating in a conference this past January where they developed a strategy and defined some common goals. Similarly, consultations with provincial representatives were held and will be held in Alberta and British Columbia.

I could continue giving examples of consultation and partnership between the federal government and the provinces. I think that everyone has understood that no government or organization alone can eliminate the obstacles preventing 3.3 million disabled Canadians from having full access to all areas of our society.

I will conclude by thanking the hon. member who presented the motion and gave me the opportunity to discuss this subject in the House of Commons. I trust that I have clearly shown the consultation that exists between the federal government and the provinces. Above all, I had this chance to highlight all that is being done at all levels to give the disabled more opportunity for real control over their lives and to let them take their rightful place in their own provinces and in Canada.