

Private Members' Business

We come together and, thanks to the co-ordination, funding and support of the Department of the Secretary of State, we are attracting more community involvement and media attention each year. The week's basic goal remains the same. That goal is to change not only physical barriers but attitudinal barriers as well. That goal is to make Canada accessible to all its citizens.

We are forging partnerships that will do just that. The National Access Awareness Week committee includes 23 national groups and organizations working in every part of Canada on behalf of persons with disabilities. Thousands of Canadians help to plan the innovative activity that made the week such a resounding success.

Hon. members will know that one of the key areas on which the National Access Awareness Week focuses is transportation. Canada has had international recognition for its leadership in transportation.

That global profile is the result of new provisions in the government's 1987 National Transportation Act, which requires carriers and terminal operators for air, rail and ferry services to provide access to travellers with disabilities. As well, the special report on intercity bus accessibility commits the federal, provincial and territorial governments to develop an implementation strategy to increase access in that area.

We are already making progress. Hon. members will know that Transport Canada has funded development of a mechanized lift for intercity buses at a cost of \$250,000. The department has also agreed to provide \$1.2 million toward purchasing six lift equipped buses. They will be used in a three-year demonstration project in the corridor that takes in Kitchener, Hamilton, Niagara Falls, and Buffalo.

I know that hon. members will be pleased to know that the government is making every effort to ensure that persons with disabilities will not be subjected to an embarrassing loss of dignity when travelling. In that regard, between 1980 and 1988 Transport Canada spent approximately \$17 million to improve accessibility at airports.

Parking, curb cuts, washrooms, and water fountains have been improved so they are more easily accessible. Other improvements have included everything from talking signs to aid people with visual impairment, to handrails and access ramps for travellers who have

difficulty moving about. Transport Canada has contributed \$145,000 toward a joint program with the Ontario government to operate four mini-vans in the Ottawa area. The vans which are operated by two taxi companies, are easily accessible to disabled passengers. This experiment is evaluating the potential of a taxi company as a viable alternative to para-transit services or perhaps as a complementary service.

This government has not overlooked the needs of disabled persons in small urban and rural areas. More than \$3 million in grants have been put toward retrofitting 130 vehicles to transport people in smaller communities.

I am sure my hon. colleagues will agree that many persons with disabilities are perfectly capable of driving their own vehicles. This government certainly believes that. Transport Canada will spend nearly \$675,000 testing vehicles adapted for drivers with disabilities and will assist them in driver training. This is definitely an appealing option in a disabled person's goal for greater autonomy.

After soliciting the views of more than 1,200 parties with an interest in transportation services for the disabled, the National Transportation Agency has submitted regulations for approval by Governor in Council, which will abolish additional fares for disabled persons travelling by air in Canada.

The agency has determined that some persons with disabilities have no choice but to travel with an assistant. Also, some disabled people require additional seats to accommodate their disability. Initially, the proposed regulations will only apply to aircraft with 30 or more seats.

To measure the impact of these regulations, the agency will review data filed by the carriers annually. At a later date the agency will develop regulations for carriers with fewer than 30 seats. I am sure hon. members will agree that the proposed regulations will make it easier for persons with disabilities to travel throughout Canada.

So, as I am sure my hon. colleagues can see, this government is doing everything in its power to give an equal opportunity to give full access and equal opportunity to persons with disabilities. After all, these are fundamental rights of Canadian citizenship, not privileges to be enjoyed only by the majority. We all experi-