

Private Members' Business

easiest tasks are not so easy for them. As a federal government we need to set examples for other levels of government to follow and we need to urge all governments to honour their commitments to every member of their communities. As technology advances, life can become easier for many disabled adults across this country. As the federal government it is our moral obligation to ensure that each and every Canadian has access to this technology.

One way this can be done is by urging provincial ministers and their governments to work with disabled groups and those they represent to find a consensus on services that are needed and wanted. In a strategy by the Secretary of State called "National Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities", there are some statistics of interest. In the area of employment it states that in 1986 nearly three out of every five persons with a disability made less than \$10,000. Women with disabilities experience an employment rate of 62 per cent to the rate of men with disabilities. Only 40 per cent of the adults with disabilities are in the paid labour force, compared to 70 per cent of the general population.

In the area of transportation, approximately 50 per cent of the people with disabilities who need specialized transportation services have access to them and only one province in Canada has any specialized vehicles for province-wide travel.

In education, only 56 per cent of the disabled population has eight or more years of schooling, compared to 83 per cent of the general population.

In communicating with groups that have a special interest in this area, I have received a response from the Regina and District Association for Community Living. In its communication to me it makes a statement that I feel bears some contemplation.

Creating a segregated and restricting environment for the person with a mental handicap is like planting and cultivating a garden in such a way that primarily the weeds flourish. So you spend most of your time and energy trying to come to terms with the weeds without fundamentally altering your approach to gardening.

It goes on to say that there appears to be very little comprehension of the magnitude of the issues affecting and preventing people with disabilities from leading more normal, productive and less dependent lives in our society. It further comments that it is its vision, and one that I share, that all individuals will be accepted as valuable and contributing members of our families, communities and society, regardless of the level of

support required to do so, and the association offers to work together with us in the resolve of these goals.

It is its feeling that personal empowerment must be the goal, while economic and social changes are the vehicles that must take place if individuals with a mental handicap are going to consistently achieve their potential. Our society now invests 19 to 21 years of mandatory educational services in these individuals, only to watch dishearteningly as they deteriorate after leaving school because of lack of opportunities, support and assistance.

There are two major themes that any significant social or economic change to services to individuals with a disability must address. One is consumer choice, power. The second is community commitment. The collective vision that has begun to emerge is that individual consumers or their guardians with their own purchasing power are deciding what services they need or want and are purchasing these services in a community setting of their choice.

We see the next four components as the framework from which social and economic changes will have a significant impact on personal empowerment. They are disability pension plans, employment equity with long-term support services, enriched/innovative housing that has CMHC support, and addressing the issues of poverty both from a financial as well as from an experiential perspective.

Let us talk about the disability pension plan for just a moment. There are already a number of disability pension and compensation plans available to some citizens. These are limited almost exclusively to people who have been in the work force. The same benefits should apply to people who are or become disabled before entering the labour force. Further, most provincial government assistance programs for adults such SAP are not intended for long-term sustenance for people who are disabled and dependent on the state. Most have serious and substantial disincentives, including employment, built into them.

In the second area of employment equity and day program continuum, more than 70 per cent of adults with a mental handicap are not gainfully employed. If you cannot access employment, you cannot therefore access unemployment insurance benefits or the wide range of employment initiatives through Canada manpower. Regular employment opportunities are seen as a critical part of the process of integration of people with a disability into everyday community life.