

Routine Proceedings

the cabinet, but the government thinking policy-makers—to consider the disabled community when they are making decisions.

I wonder if the hon. member knows that, in the recent initiative on developing employment opportunities in Canada by Employment and Immigration, the disabled community was not even mentioned and was not even thought of. It was not until they mounted an argument and a lobby that they began to be even included. That is the kind of thing we want changed, not only in the federal government, but in provincial and municipal governments.

If the hon. member sincerely feels that we should not be using the time of the House to debate such an important matter, that is fine with me, he does not have to participate in the debate. But I would urge him to do so because this matter is of so much importance to the way we, the able-bodied, see Canada, that unless we come to terms with these very key arguments, I do not think we will come to recognize the problem let alone the solutions.

Mrs. Pauline Browes (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State of Canada and Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Citizenship)): Mr. Speaker, I speak on behalf of the government today to join in the concurrence in the motion that is before us and to acknowledge the valuable work of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons in their report *A Consensus for Action—The Economic Integration of Disabled Persons*. I want to underline the government's commitment to the objectives of the economic integration for Canadians with disabilities.

On November 8 the Secretary of State for Canada tabled with the House of Commons the government's positive response to the second report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and The Status of Disabled Persons. It was tabled in written form, as is the usual way, but it was also tabled in video form so that those persons who are unable to read the written word are able to appreciate the report also.

Every member of the House recognizes that 13 per cent of our population with disabilities, some 3.2 million Canadians, have a long way yet to go before they can achieve the same rights to access and participation in the life of our society and country that most of us take for

granted. Nowhere is that more evident than when it comes to the question of economic integration. Persons with disabilities are among the poorest members of our society. Sixty per cent of the disabled in the 1986 census reported incomes under \$10,000, and their participation rate in the paid labour force is only slightly above half of that of adult Canadians without a disability.

Without economic integration, very few Canadians with disabilities will ever know economic independence, and without that independence, participation in society will seldom be realized.

We know that within the disabled community of Canada there is a resource of talent and ability which, given the opportunity, can not only improve the lives of persons with disabilities themselves, but also contribute significantly to our society's growth and prosperity.

These are the beliefs reflected in the recommendations of the standing committee's report. When the government tabled its response to the standing committee's report on November 8, my colleague, the Secretary of State, clearly signalled its commitment to the chairperson of the standing committee, the hon. member for Oxford. I am so pleased that he is in the House today. He has shown nearly 20 years of commitment to the disabled community and he is to be commended for that tremendous work.

The government also shared in that letter to the chairman of the committee that we would build on the beliefs of those recommendations addressing the needs of persons with disabilities.

Let us look at the standing committee's recommendation and the government's positive response to them.

• (1550)

Recommendation one of the standing committee called for the Government of Canada to work with the committee, the voluntary sector, the private sector, labour and with the disabled community itself to bring forward a national strategy to achieve the economic integration of persons with disabilities.

What was the government response? In no uncertain terms the government pledged itself to the objective of economic integration. It pledged that not only would the minister responsible for the disabled work in partnership toward this goal, but that the Ministers of Health and