

Employment Equity

I remember a case in my constituency where the Department of Public Works finally had to do something after being told that the handicapped need a ramp to have access to a building. Otherwise, they had to use the backdoor, not because the authorities did not want to accommodate them, but because no one had thought about it. Telephones have now been installed for the handicapped. I invite other Members to visit as I did seven or eight years ago the National Research Centre to see what the federal Government is doing to help give the handicapped access to an adequate working environment. Research has been done to provide transportation and technical or physical assistance needed by the handicapped, such as typewriters. I even saw a mouth-operated typewriter. This typewriter would work rather well in this House because there was a little mouthpiece in which to blow to operate the keys. I saw things which surprised me because I was not more aware than anyone else about the needs of the handicapped. It is essential for politicians who want to be understood and heard by the Canadian public and by the people who will be affected by Bill C-62 that there be a definition of the term "reasonable accommodation". It seems to me very important that the employer meet these requirements.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to take too long because I know that this matter concerns other Members of this House who also want to speak. Regarding access to employment, I just want to say that for the disabled it may be humiliating at times. I remember I once had to accompany a person on the Hill because the elevator doors closed too quickly and she didn't have a chance to get in before the doors shut.

We will have to be more sensitive and we may have to be more specific about what we want in the way of facilities and adequate job environments for people. I know some people have back problems, and as a chiropractor, I certainly know what I am talking about. There are an incredible number of people, even Members of this House, who have bad backs because they are not sitting properly, either too low or too high, or the chair is too soft. Well, if someone has a bad back and cannot function properly, we must do something. Mr. Speaker, I would say to these people: You should remember that the job environment is important, including the height of your desk and the height of your chair. For the physically disabled it is even more important, because they cannot work if the job environment is not adapted to their needs, and that is why this Bill must be amended, and why we insist there must be a definition, not because we want it to be more specific than a regulation, but because we want a clear and specific policy aimed at a group of people who have special needs and who naturally need special assistance.

I may remind the House that in five years nearly 400 people have been hired by various departments and agencies here in the National Capital. That is a lot, and these are people who in the past had been unable to find the right job or the right job environment.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore support the Hon. Member's amendment, and I hope that this House will not concentrate on

drafting regulations but on more careful definition of a term that is important within the context of this Bill, namely, reasonable accommodation in the job environment including all the "adaptations" that are necessary to enable the disabled to have access to their place of work.

• (1730)

[English]

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, the amendment which I hope the Government will accept proposes to provide a more adequate definition of reasonable accommodation in Bill C-62. The Government has said that this has been left to the regulations.

I have had an opportunity to read the Government's discussion paper on information and proposed contents of regulations. One of the proposed definitions that has not been implemented is that there should be a reference to making appropriate accommodation for members of designated groups to enable entry to areas from which they have previously been excluded. That concerns accessibility rather than reasonable accommodation. For example, does someone who is disabled because of a hearing loss have the right to have a simple device to carry out a job or will that person in fact be denied a job because the employer is not prepared to pay \$500 to provide that device that is required to do the job properly? It is situations like that which are covered under the definition of reasonable accommodation.

We know that access is still a problem in many areas under federal jurisdiction. It is my personal experience, and I am sure that of other Members in the House, that we are the most likely culprits in terms of providing reasonable accommodation for handicapped people who wish to see us in our constituency offices. Now that the weather has changed, we are about to build a ramp and install a communications device at our constituency office. Unfortunately, my riding office has rather high steps at the front and disabled people will have to use a ramp at the rear in order to enter the building. However, although it has been a year since we moved into those premises, we are aware of the problem and are rectifying it this spring.

I suspect that more than half the Members of the House have constituency offices which are not physically accessible to many handicapped people. I suspect there are virtually no Members who have communication devices that enable them to communicate with the hearing impaired. While improvements will be made as our awareness of these problems increases, it will take more than increasing awareness on the part of many employers in the private sector and the federal Government itself, I suggest, that has shown itself to be incredibly obtuse in the past on this particular issue.

I return to my point that I believe we have great human potential. Many people who are disabled or otherwise suffer from employment discrimination could be doing a good job. Charlotte Whitton and many other women have said that women succeeded when given employment because they had to