

aspects. Perhaps such an agency could even work directly with us under an expanded budget and mandate for this Committee. There is much to be said for the beneficial results of having two complementary and separate bodies sharing responsibility for a policy area. Competition can lead to progress.

But we confess to doubts about the capacity of an independent agency to effect immediate changes. In the long-term, such an agency might have a significant impact, but in the short-term, the members of such a body would be occupied with the necessary steps to become truly operational. Delays would result from the need to find offices, hire staff, decide on appropriate areas in which to exercise its mandate and establish working relationships throughout the government structure. Realistically, it would take a minimum of three years before any such agency could become effective.

Because this Committee shares with disabled persons an impatient wish for immediate action, we are looking for a mechanism that can easily be incorporated into the existing structure of government. This can and should be supplemented by other actions, perhaps a task-force established by the Prime Minister that compares to the environmental roundtable, or a Prime Minister's special representative. These could be superseded in time by an agency reporting to this Committee. A voice at the centre is imperative because, as we noted above, disabled persons units, directorates and secretariats appear to function on the margin of their respective departments. In short, they are not effectively integrated into the central decision-making process of government.

What we seek is the best means to achieve this integration. In our system, the final decisions regarding the government's priorities and programs are made by the cabinet and by its committees. The responsibility for policing the preparation of memoranda to cabinet, preparing the agenda, briefing the Prime Minister and the chairs of committees and of dealing with crisis, lies in the Privy Council Office (PCO). The PCO, in turn, is divided into secretariats designated to deal with groups of issues. We wonder if disabled persons are well served by the Privy Council Office. Unlike women, visible minorities, or aboriginal people, there has never been an officer in the Privy Council Office whose sole responsibility has been to coordinate cabinet business inasmuch as it relates to disabled persons. We feel that disabled persons deserve more than this.

We therefore urge the immediate appointment of a ranking official of the PCO to assume responsibility for disabled persons and to perform the relevant ongoing functions related to cabinet activities. This official could serve as the link to cabinet of a high-level committee that is composed of representatives, perhaps deputy ministers, of other central agencies and significant departments. This could ensure that all government agencies take action, as required.