

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 17, 1986

The House met at 11 a.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 106(8), I have the honour of tabling, in both official languages, the Government's response to the following nine petitions: Nos. 331-182, 331-188, 331-196, 331-252, 331-278, 331-286, 331-307, 331-308 and 331-309.

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CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF PROCLAMATION

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Secretary of State of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of the House that today, as Hon. Members are no doubt aware, we are celebrating the anniversary of the proclamation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which took place on April 17, 1982, and also of the coming into effect a year ago of the provisions guaranteeing equality for all members of our society.

[English]

It is a day on which Hon. Members will come together to commemorate a commitment to equality, social justice, tolerance and fairness for all Canadians in keeping with basic standards of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, our Government has demonstrated its support for these important principles by taking steps to enforce the provisions of the Charter more vigorously. We took the initiative in assessing and amending current legislation and policies to ensure that they reflect a broad interpretation of the Charter. In doing so, we have tried to rise above the conventional political options and take a new and broader view.

[English]

At the same time we have been ever mindful of the fact that in order to make this a reality special measures are necessary for groups in our society, such as the disabled, women, visible minorities, natives, youth and elderly Canadians. For example,

last December new initiatives and increased funding was announced to improve the status of disabled persons.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the role played by Canadians in carrying out this difficult task, which consists in defining the mechanisms for bringing about equality and social justice in Canada. When we asked for suggestions and comments in connection with major policy initiatives, the response we received was not only a very valid one, it was also representative of a large part of Canadian society.

[English]

We are committed to the continuation of this process of consultation because we believe Canadians have the right to participate in the development of policy that fundamentally affects their lives.

There is no doubt that the charter is affecting all of our lives. It requires courts and Governments to be ever aware of the need to balance individual and societal rights in a fashion which facilitates society's interest with the least amount of restriction upon individual rights. The charter is giving individuals a new opportunity to seek redress when their rights are infringed upon. It also imposes on all an obligation to be tolerant of the rights of others.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, as we take further steps to promote equal opportunity, access to social benefits, respect for our official languages and other measures designed to give all Canadians a fair chance to succeed in our society, we will try to build a better society for all Canadians, a society founded on the basic principles enshrined in our Constitution.

I hope that all Hon. Members will continue to work towards achieving this collective goal.

● (1110)

[English]

Mr. Roland de Corneille (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister for his words on this important day, the fourth anniversary of the proclamation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is also the first anniversary of the Charter being brought into force. We in Canada can be proud, in a world as we see it today, of the fact that we are a torch held aloft for freedom. Canada is a nation perceived throughout the world as a democracy, one that is tolerant, one that has signed the International Human Rights Covenants and given leadership in all aspects of human rights. We have also shown we are prepared to carry out those