

Private Members' Business

I asked in the committee on the human rights and status of disabled persons of which I am a member how many times had that subcommittee of deputy ministers met. They have met twice. I received the written answer last week. There have been two meetings with one deputy minister in attendance and one person assigned by a deputy minister in attendance.

If that is their strategy, it is one I do not want. If their strategy is not to do anything then I would rather not have the darn strategy.

The problem with the strategy is that no one has sat down and worked out timetables of when these things are supposed to happen, when they will come into place. The strategy itself as announced is not a bad strategy but it is only going to be a good strategy if somebody does something about it.

I will repeat what I said a few minutes ago. It is not that anyone says the wrong things about the need for assistance if you happen to be disabled. The problem is getting them to do the right thing. That is the problem.

I will give another example, a very simple matter in my view. We recommended in the Obstacles report that the Canadian Human Rights Act be amended to include a section that said people had a duty to accommodate persons with disabilities. Simple.

The United States, which in my view was a very regressive society, way behind Canada on issues affecting disabled people up until about a year ago, finally did that. It adopted the Americans with disabilities act which recognizes that society has a duty to accommodate persons with disabilities.

I do not recall what was in the calculations. I see the very able chairman of our committee sitting over there. He may remember. It was calculated in the United States that by society continuing to ignore its disabled population it was costing that society in the range of billions and billions of tax dollars in the year. It was calculated that the total population of disabled persons who were not employed in regular work and were not making contributions to American society was costing billions of dollars in American tax money to support them.

That was an incentive. They came forward with a piece of legislation that may not fit in Canada but at least it established some principles. The principles were that a

disabled person in American society, and I would argue the same should be in existence in Canada, should have the same access to services as every other person who is able-bodied.

That is why I say it is a matter and a question of justice. It is not a question of hand-outs to someone who is disabled. They do not want that. Disabled people that I know are quite capable of looking after themselves in the main with some assistance.

It seems to me that our society would be much further ahead. In fact, we have to ask ourselves what kind of society we want to live in. Do we want to live in a society where we exclude millions of Canadians because they happen to be disabled, or do we want a society that includes every Canadian and allows every Canadian to live within the mainstream of Canadian society?

I can see that my time has expired, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Murray W. Dorin (Edmonton Northwest): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say at the outset that we should be grateful to the hon. member for Regina—Wascana for raising this subject in Parliament. The issue of providing benefits and services to persons with disabilities is one that hon. members know first hand has been in the minds of many, both here and in the other place.

Hon. members will recall that during debate last year on Bill C-38, an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan, many of the issues raised and concerns expressed, both by hon. members and by witnesses appearing before the legislative committee, had to do with the disability pension provisions of the Canada Pension Plan.

Hon. members are no doubt aware that in addition to providing retirement, survivor's and children's benefits, the Canada Pension Plan also provides a monthly disability pension to contributors with a severe and prolonged disability. The maximum monthly benefit is currently \$784 per month.

The fact that disability issues were the focus of so much discussion during debate on Bill C-39 was quite remarkable, given that the bill was addressing the financing of the Canada Pension Plan and an increase in children's benefits.

In response to these concerns and those expressed about other provisions of the Canada Pension Plan, the Minister of National Health and Welfare made a commitment to Parliament to raise these issues with his