

*Government Orders*

There are four designated groups which continue to be designated: aboriginal peoples, members of visible minorities, women and persons with disabilities. The principle of self identification is reaffirmed and definitions of the groups are in the legislation.

The legislation carries enforcement measures. It ensures that the Canadian Human Rights Commission has the mandate to conduct on site compliance reviews. It also confirms the administrative responsibility for the federal contractors program to the Minister of Human Resources Development. It makes use of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal which when hearing employment equity complaint cases will be called the employment equity review tribunal. This body will hear appeals from employers and referrals from the CHRC and ensure the final enforcement of the act.

With regard to the designated groups under the legislation they continue to be under represented as well as under valued in federal agencies and in federally regulated industries.

A recent study conducted by Krishna Pendakur of Simon Fraser University and Ravi Pendakur entitled "Earning differentials among ethnic groups in Canada" found that similarly qualified Canadian born visible minorities earn about 11 per cent less than Canadian born white people and that immigrant visible minorities earn 15 per cent less than Canadian born whites.

• (1605)

We are also familiar with the term glass ceiling, barriers to upper level management faced by many women and minorities in companies and agencies. This issue is addressed in applying more effective employment equity legislation.

We also found through partnership with the Canadian Advertising Foundation, the Asia-Pacific Foundation and the Conference Board of Canada that being sensitive and responsive to diversity is good for business. It makes economic sense and it is the fair thing to do. Companies that are sensitive to the diversity of the reality of Canada, that is the Canadian population, and companies that have made a commitment from the top down that they will be reflective of the people of this land have the key to the future: economic security. This is real at the local, national and international level.

Fairer access, meritorious advancement and equality of opportunity are key for all corporations that want to compete in the global marketplace. Our Canadian people often reflect and know the cultures of the new global markets. Why not use our diversity as a valued competitive edge to our mutual benefit? Global business is multicultural, multilingual and multiracial. Anyone travelling would know that; anyone in international business knows that.

Applying the rule of self-identified employment equity laws is an important tool to effect real institutional change, which is in the best interest of all Canadians and is an incentive for people to self-identify or to identify themselves.

This is a bill with a heart, one that recognizes the reality of Canadian business life. It clarifies existing obligations and helps to widen the circle of inclusion in our workforce at all levels. It does not force employers to create new positions, require the hiring or promoting of unqualified individuals, or contradict the merit principle in the public sector. It is about fairness and merit. It would be worthwhile if members opposite would keep all these issues in mind when speaking to this matter and tell the truth about what is in the bill.

It is about fairness and merit. It is about quality, not quantity. The bill does not call for nor is it about quotas for non-qualified members of designated groups.

[Translation]

Since the bill on employment equity was tabled for first reading, the members of the Reform Party have had a great deal to say about it.

In fact, it would be more accurate to state that they have had a great deal to say against it. They are rejecting the bill and the reason for their rejection is either that they are against measures in favour of employment equity or that they do not grasp the nature and scope of this bill.

[English]

Hon. members must recognize that this will simply not happen by crossing our fingers and hoping that we will achieve our goals of access, equity, fairness and a starting chance for self-identified minorities who wish to have consideration and to be included in the enlarged circle of the family of Canada.

In order to reach this goal some of the CHRC's responsibilities are education, awareness and sensitization to our multicultural reality. It will enable companies touched by this law to effect institutional change over time. We broadened the circle of representation through encouragement and education rather than through coercion. We do it because it is the right thing to do for Canada's qualified population by addressing whatever systemic barriers may be present that inhibit the representation of our diversity.

Before I close I highlight the Bank of Montreal as an example of a corporation that has demonstrated its commitment to create both an equitable workplace and a workforce that reflects the community it serves and a leadership that believes in fairness and a widened circle of service to the grassroots, the people they want to do business with.