

Private Members' Business

What I am pointing out is that there is a connection between being impaired, having a lack of opportunity and being destined to a life of poverty. Those are rather alarming statistics and we should address this problem on a very broad scale. It should not be narrowed down to where we think all we have to do is provide a few more ramps or something. It has to be looked at in a much broader context.

Mr. Speaker, I know my time is running out. But the best model that I have found for legislation is in the United States, where two years ago it passed what is called the ADA, the American Disability Act. It is a model which I think Canada should look at. It is a model for the world and the world's strongest protection for disabled people is in the United States right now.

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches—Woodbine): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the hon. member for Regina—Wascana gave us the opportunity to debate the concerns of disabled Canadians in the House of Commons. Unfortunately, we are not presented with that opportunity often enough.

The motion that has been put forward by the hon. member, and I want to read it for the record, says:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should convene a conference of the appropriate provincial ministers to promote the adoption of programs that will ensure that disabled adults across Canada receive the comprehensive services they need to function in society.

This is not a new notion. The previous speaker referred to the work of the then Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons in preparation for the International Year of the Disabled. That committee, of which I was a member, tabled its report in the House of Commons in 1981 and that report was named *The Obstacles* report.

I want to say that the *Obstacles* report was considered internationally as the Magna Carta for the disabled into the next century, it was thought of so highly.

In that report there were 130 recommendations, one of which emphasized the need for the provincial governments and the federal government to co-ordinate their activities, on not only services for disabled persons but also employment needs, transportation needs, education needs, recreational needs, all those areas of society that

able-bodied persons take for granted but which are denied to many persons with disabilities.

That is not a new recommendation. If the government decided in its wisdom to act on this motion, I would strongly urge it not to do it through convening a meeting of health ministers. That has been the problem over the years. There has been this view of people who may have a disability somehow or other being in need of medical services. There could be nothing further from the truth, in my experience. In fact, if there were anything to be convened, it should be among ministers of justice, both at the provincial and federal levels.

What is really required from legislators and policy-makers in this country is to view disabled issues as matters of justice, economic justice, just plain old-fashioned justice. It has nothing to do with medical needs. Some people may need medical assistance to allow them to participate in the mainstream of Canadian society, but some able-bodied Canadians need that.

What is sorely missing over the period from 1980 until 1992 is a serious commitment to that principle. It is not that anyone says the wrong thing about issues of concern to disabled Canadians. That is not the problem. You can find all kinds of statements over the years where all kinds of people say the right things about what should happen. The problem is that no one does the right things.

It is action that is required, Mr. Speaker, rather than promises. The member who moved the motion made reference to the five-year strategy that was announced by the government last year, a five-year strategy for the integration of disabled persons into the mainstream of Canadian society.

• (1930)

Under that strategy, to make sure that the strategy worked and was implemented, it was proposed that a committee of deputy ministers meet on a regular basis to take a look at laws where they discriminate against the disabled population, to take a look at services that discriminate against persons with disability, to take a look at areas of government policy where we have control to ensure that anything that was of a discriminatory nature that affected persons with disabilities in Canada would be removed.

That was last summer.