

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 31, 1988

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and 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 twelve petitions numbered as follows: 332-4105, 332-4452 to 332-4456 inclusive, 332-4457, 332-4537, 332-4538, 332-4585, 332-4614 and 332-4641.

[*Editor's Note: See today's Votes and Proceedings.*]

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EMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY

Hon. Monique Vézina (Minister of State (Employment and Immigration)): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow we shall take one more step towards genuine employment equity in Canada.

As you know, the Employment Equity Act was passed in 1986. Under this legislation, all federally-regulated businesses which have 100 or more employees are required to submit an annual report on employment equity. The first series of annual reports is to be submitted not later than tomorrow, June 1.

For the very first time we will have information on the occupational levels and remuneration of four groups designated under the Employment Equity Act: women, Native people, members of visible minorities and disabled persons.

Judging from the reaction of employers, it is clear they are spending quite a bit of time and money to comply with the provisions of the legislation. They are aware of the benefits of, and the need for, improved employment equity in this country.

Before I continue my speech, Mr. Speaker, I would like to pay tribute to my colleague, the Minister of Communications

(Miss MacDonald), who played a key role in introducing and preparing the Employment Equity Act. Thanks to her efforts as Minister of Employment and Immigration, we can now enjoy the benefits of this legislation.

Under the legislation, all federally-regulated employers, Crown corporations as well as private sector businesses, are required to eliminate employment barriers, to adopt special measures and to make arrangements to accommodate certain differences. As a result, the designated groups will be able to meet the competitive challenge in the workplace. Until now, these groups have not been given a fair chance. Special measures are therefore necessary to help them close the gap.

Under the legislation, the employers concerned, mostly in the fields of banking, transportation and communications, must identify and remove barriers to the employment and promotion of women, Native people, members of visible minorities and disabled persons.

Employers must make an effort to achieve equitable representation in their work force. To that end, they must ensure that designated groups are represented in all occupations and at all levels of their organization. Their annual reports must indicate the rate of representation of designated groups according to occupational categories and salary ranges; they must also report on hirings, promotions and terminations of target group members.

Subsequently, we will verify, process and analyse these reports. They will be published and made available to the persons concerned across Canada. Later this year, I shall table in the House my first annual report on employment equity.

Mr. Speaker, our country was built on diversity. Nevertheless, the Abella Royal Commission showed us that there exists in Canadian workplaces a system that has always denied the very existence of such diversity.

As Rosalie Abella said in her report, "It is not that individuals in the designated groups are inherently unable to achieve equality on their own, it is that the obstacles in their way are so formidable and self-perpetuating that they cannot be overcome without intervention."

Systematic discrimination excludes members of certain groups through rules or employment customs that have nothing to do with the position or that are unnecessary for sound, effective management.

It is a fact that the unemployment rate for the groups covered by the Act tends to be higher than for other Canadians