

Statements by Ministers

may have taken in the ongoing process of establishing equal opportunities for the handicapped to have full access to transportation, and for the elimination of physical and attitudinal barriers to travel. However, I gather that some Members of the Standing Committee on Transport, which is touring the country and taking evidence, are puzzled as to why the Minister did not wait to make her statement until tomorrow when they would be back in Ottawa and able to be present.

● (1610)

I said that I welcomed any signs of progress and I have listened carefully to her statement. Mr. Speaker, I had to listen carefully because, regrettably, there is precious little in her statement that shows progress or that is new since either the press release of her immediate predecessor six months ago or since the progress report made by the last Liberal Government in 1983 entitled *Surmounting Obstacles*. The Minister said that now is the time for action and then she proceeded to give us 10 action steps. However, of the 10 steps she cited, eight of them appeared in her predecessor's news release of six months ago and she has repeated them almost word for word. Of the two items that are new, neither of them are action oriented but are announcements of more committees and conferences, important though they are. Basically there is no new action at all except with regard to the announcement of 25 communities which will later learn what will be coming to them.

Regrettably, what we heard was not a statement by a Minister to bring some new developments to the attention of the House, but just one more in a long series of attempts by the Government to try to take something which was an initiative undertaken during the last Liberal Government, dress it up in a Tory blue wrapper and call it, as she has done, a new policy. It is too bad that they do not leave well enough alone, give credit where credit is due and get on with new and further action. It seems that the Conservatives just cannot bring themselves to lead, to set the example and to act. All they can do is to lick the bullet—they just cannot bring themselves to bite it.

As far back as 1980 the Parliament of Canada established a special committee on the disabled and the handicapped to review the scope of federal programs in the area of disability. In 1981 it made its report called *Obstacles* which contained 130 recommendations to improve the status of disabled and handicapped Canadians. Action progress was monitored by this committee and subsequent reports showed that by 1983 the Government had dealt with two-thirds of the recommendations and with three-quarters of those dealing with transportation.

While the Canadian Government did much in the past to deal with such matters within its jurisdiction, and should have done even more, the fact is that the real door to equality for the handicapped was thrown open by the passage of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms by the last Liberal Government. That, Mr. Speaker, is what will ultimately force all those who provide public service to give equal access to the

handicapped and that is what will propel the Government to some action.

Thanks to the Charter, thanks to the courts, thanks to a decision by a Saskatchewan court last June, and thanks to the Supreme Court for its decision not to allow an appeal, a key principle in this regard was established. Now the handicapped across Canada can demand that appropriate measures be taken to ensure that equal access becomes a reality. Because of the Charter the courts say that identical treatment is not necessarily equal treatment and, therefore, special steps must be taken in any public place to give equal access to the handicapped. It is because of the Charter that the Government must be made to act. It must not be allowed to wait for the courts to settle every case. It must be forced to be bold, to make regulations and to pass laws.

The Minister talked about "developing a detailed strategy" in her blueprint for action, "clarification of procedures", "encouraging negotiation", "working in a spirit of consensus and co-operation", "appointing task forces", and "finalizing guidelines". That is hardly what we would call the language of resolute and vigorous action, Mr. Speaker. What is more, the Minister of State for Transport (Mrs. Blais-Grenier) has not announced any minimum standards. She has not announced any timetable. She has not announced any figures showing financial commitment. She has only recycled an old press release.

Laurie Beachell, National Co-ordinator for the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped, COPOH, says that instead of vague guidelines detailed standards are needed to force compliance. David Blaker, Executive Director of the Advocacy Research Centre for the Handicapped in Toronto, says that they need to be made law. We still do not hear from the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) and the Government that they will bring in standards, regulations and laws because they do not believe in that sort of thing. Why did the Government not bring in an immediate response to the equality rights report and fulfil recommendations 48 and 49 of that report? That could have been done today. The Government does not want to regulate. It prefers to deregulate.

It is precisely because the Tories lick the bullet instead of biting it that today, tomorrow and, regrettably, for some time to come, many disabled people will be refused transportation and will be discriminated against. If they want justice, it looks as if they cannot turn to the Government for it but will have to turn to the courts and call on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to uphold their rights. Thank God for the Charter.

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches): Mr. Speaker, as my Party's critic for those Canadians who are disabled and handicapped, as a member of the special House of Commons Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped which existed in the last Parliament, and also as a member of the Standing Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped I would like to say a few words about what the Minister has said. I read through the Minister's remarks which she very kindly provided to me yesterday. At the outset it was my intention to give her a bit of a hard time. However, the Minister has only held that position of