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Resources, Skills Development, Social
Development and the Status of Persons with
Disabilities**

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Chair

Mr. Ken Boshcoff

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• (1905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Honourable Minister, we'd like to welcome you to our committee. We can begin when you are ready to begin.

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board): Thank you. I apologize for being a few minutes late. I was delayed by a cabinet meeting.

I'm delighted to be here. This is a topic I have a particular interest in. My very first job leaving high school was with the deaf community. I worked with the deaf community for a number of years, and then went into child welfare.

I am particularly interested in the work of this subcommittee, because this subcommittee has a history of working diligently and conscientiously on a multi-party basis on these issues, on giving voice to a community that needs it. I'm looking forward to the report that you will produce out of this series of discussions.

One thing came home to me a little while ago. There's an organization called Disabled Peoples' International, a UN group headquartered in Winnipeg. I had the privilege of speaking at a national congress they had, with people in from I think 70 different countries. One of the things they pointed out repeatedly throughout that experience was that Canada is seen as being a leader in services to the disabled community, and in no small part because of our Charter of Rights, because of the foundation the charter gives explicitly in terms of the protection of equality under the law, without discrimination based on physical disability.

Now, I understand this is your fifth meeting on this subject. You've had an opportunity to hear from officials from various departments, from the Clerk of the House and even from my colleague Steven Fletcher, who is a model, in many ways, for what one can do if one has the necessary supports.

At your last meeting, on March 9, you had an opportunity to hear from officials from the Department of Public Works and Government Services. A large part of that meeting was related to accessibility both to and inside federal buildings, including the House of Commons.

Today I'd like to review from a slightly different perspective some of the issues raised at the last meeting. These include the real property accessibility policy, the communications policy, the federal identity program, the Common Look and Feel policy, and employment equity issues.

As President of the Treasury Board, it's my responsibility to ensure that the application of standards continues to meet or exceed the needs of the disabled community. I take that responsibility very seriously.

As the management board of government, Treasury Board oversees the management of federal real property. We have the largest inventory of buildings and properties in Canada. Specific administration policies apply to over 40,000, which are under the administration of 14 departments and agencies. These departments must comply with the real property accessibility policy approved by the Treasury Board in 1990. This policy was updated in 1994 and again in 2000. The policy states, simply and clearly, that it is government policy to ensure barrier-free access to, and the use of, real property it owns or leases.

Essentially, it defines the level of accessibility required in federal facilities, whether Crown-owned, leased, or leased to purchase. It describes which building components must be accessible, as well as the areas where reduced levels of accessibility may be permissible. It establishes where signage, including tactile signs, is required for federal facilities. The federal identity program determines the standards for design, fabrication, and installation of such signage.

The real property accessibility policy is applied to the current federal inventory, to the acquisition of buildings, and to new building construction, and is a factor in all major renovations. It also specifies the use of the Canadian Standards Association's technical standards for the design of accessible building components. It was developed through a consensus process that involved disability groups, industry, the federal government, and the Canadian Standards Association. This national technical standard sets out requirements for making buildings and other facilities accessible to persons with a range of physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities.

The Treasury Board policy and the reference to CSA standards are examples of the leadership that the federal government is taking in prescribing a minimum requirement for federal buildings that is much higher than any found in the provinces or territories.

When the Treasury Board policy on accessibility came into effect in 1990, it triggered a five-year program to improve the level of barrier-free accessibility in the existing inventory of Crown-owned and leased facilities. It works hand in hand with the Treasury Board policy on the duty to accommodate persons with disabilities in the federal public service, which addresses the specific needs of disabled employees in their particular workplace.

Certain elements of real property may be exempted from the full accessibility requirements of the policy, unless the intended use requires public access, or the job requirements are such that a person with a disability could meet these requirements. Custodian departments must establish internal procedures for identifying and seeking deputy ministerial authority for any exemptions.

• (1910)

Implementation of the policy has generated tangible progress. There have been no complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal related to federal real property subject to this policy. Representatives from the Canadian Human Rights Commission have indicated to my officials that they are pleased with the policy and the results it has achieved.

In the initial implementation period of 1990-95, annual reports were sent to Treasury Board to ensure that the federal inventory was being retooled to meet the new policy requirements. In 1995 it was determined that the existing inventory was for the most part compliant policy.

The management accountability framework now places the onus on policy compliance with the accountable deputy ministers. The guide to the monitoring of property management helps departments in the monitoring of their compliance with accessibility policy. Specifically, the guide outlines key questions that departments should address on an ongoing basis.

The Office for Disability Issues is a focal point within the Government of Canada for key partners working to promote the full participation of Canadians with disabilities in learning, work, and community life. Many other federal departments and organizations share this goal. The Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada will play a leadership role in modernizing the federal public service. As part of its responsibility for employment equity, the agency is committed to continuously implementing initiatives to better accommodate persons with disabilities. In addition, the agency works with the departments on our policy on the duty to accommodate persons with disabilities in the federal public service. The policy is now being strengthened to clarify accountability for its implementation and improve monitoring of results.

The agency also provides financial and other types of support to the National Committee of Federal Public Servants with Disabilities. The Persons with Disabilities Online project is a collaborative effort of five federal government departments. It is aimed at individuals with disabilities as well as their families, caregivers, and service

providers. The goal is to provide a single Internet access point to a wide range of information, programs, services, and transactions offered by federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

As part of this project, work is being undertaken to enhance and better integrate the information from partner sites. For example, the mappings for the visually impaired portal provides maps and geo-spatial data online. In the future, we hope to implement a voice interface to allow users and educators to interact with maps.

For most people, technology makes things easier. For many persons with disability, technology makes things possible. We need new means of access to the Internet for those who may be excluded by mainstream developments, and while it explores and harnesses new technologies to foster greater accessibility, the government must also continue to provide access through more traditional channels.

This brings me to the communications policy of the Government of Canada. The policy recognizes that the needs of all Canadians whose perceptual or physical abilities and language skills are diverse must be recognized and accommodated. It recognizes that as the government adopts new communication technologies, departments must continue to reach citizens whose access to the technology may be limited or who prefer to receive government information through more traditional means. The communications policy explicitly requires federal institutions to provide, on request, information in a variety of formats to serve the diverse needs of Canadians.

While the policy does not require that every document for public distribution be produced in multiple format—for instance, Braille, large print, synthesized voice, or audiotape—it does recommend that documents be prepared in such a way that they can easily be made available in an alternative format, if requested. Multiple formats should be produced as a matter of course when the target audience is known to include persons with special needs.

There's a little sidebar on this. When I spoke with DPI, it was in the middle of the PSAC strike. There were several hundred public servants demonstrating outside, and they came completely equipped with multi-format media. I thought it was quite an elegant touch on the part of PSAC.

A formal review of the policy must be conducted by Treasury Board within five years of the policy's coming into effect on April 22. In that review, the issue of how effectively institutions are meeting their requirements to produce information in alternative formats, on request, will be examined. We want to enable any individual in Canada with a disability to perform any task or receive any service or information that a person without a disability can, in any format, using personal technology, anywhere, at any time. That's a reasonably tall order, but we're committed to continuing to play a leadership role in leveraging innovation to enhance the inclusion of all Canadians.

● (1915)

Canada's Chief Information Officer is spearheading much of this work through such initiatives as the federated architecture program. This program focuses on enhancing the usability of Government of Canada information for individuals. Its objective is to ensure accessible government for all Canadians, and to ensure an accommodating workplace within the federal public service. Accessibility standards are part of the Common Look and Feel standards and guidelines for the Internet, which were approved on May 2000, with full compliance required by January 1, 2003.

In June of 2003, departments and agencies conducted self-assessments of their compliance with accessibility standards. They reported an average of 83% compliance for their Internet sites, with the four Common Look and Feel standards on accessibility. The Government of Canada remains committed to providing equal access to information and services to people with disabilities, and significant progress has been made.

Finally, the public service has become more diverse. Nearly 6% of all public servants are persons with disabilities, which compares well with the workforce availability goal of just below 4%. In fact, representation of persons with disabilities now meets or exceeds their availability in the general workforce. Almost 5% of all executives in the public service are persons with disabilities. However, we still have challenges to meet, and the government is taking action to meet those challenges. We're working with other levels of government in Canada to fill the gaps in education and skills development and workplace support and accommodation for people with disabilities. We are committed to lead by example in supporting the hiring, accommodation, and retention of Canadians with disabilities in the Government of Canada, the nation's largest employer, and in federally regulated industries.

We want a Canada in which citizens with disabilities have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from Canada's prosperity, as learners, workers, volunteers, and family members. Canadian values, and especially equality of opportunity, are firmly entrenched in the government's policies and guidelines.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mrs. Skelton, please.

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Minister, thank you so much for coming this evening on such a busy evening on the Hill, and with your schedule. We really appreciate it.

I want to say that our committee has worked very well together, and we hope that we can do a good job for all Canadian citizens.

You made a very interesting speech lately, where you quoted Mr. Justin Dart, Jr. You acknowledged his role as the father of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Would you support the adoption of a similar act for Canada?

Hon. Reg Alcock: It's interesting; I have to say that, while I have a personal interest in this, and worked with this community earlier on in my career, you can get a sense from those opening remarks of just the tremendous variety in the programs that are involved. If you look around this room, you'll see a whole pile of people over here who spend an awful lot of time thinking about this, and who are really the people who have built this foundation.

When I was being briefed to come to his meeting, we actually got into a discussion, which we have agreed to follow up on, about the sense that while we've built a lot of powerful pillars here, and we're sort of getting pieces of it right, what we haven't got is an all-encompassing policy, an overall policy.

A voice: Yes

Hon. Reg Alcock: See, I'm getting support here.

It was argued that it's time to do that, so an act of that sort might be a tool. It certainly would be something that would be worth thinking about. If that's an area this committee is interested in exploring, I would certainly be interested in the results of your research.

I know that a number of people would be quite interested in coming and talking to you about some of this.

● (1920)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: We'll follow up on that and look at it, but how do you feel it would help Canadians, that type of act? If you've done a lot of studying about Justin Dart—and from your speech, I think you have—how do you think that would help us?

Hon. Reg Alcock: You know, I spent time at various stages in my career looking at American legislation on social policy. The problem with it is that their systems are structured somewhat differently from ours. They tend to use legal tools more frequently, and entitlement is different, shall I say.

To step back to my other role at Treasury Board, I have argued for a long time that what we really are on about is modernizing the Government of Canada. What we are trying to do is bring new tools to the work of government, to provide public servants with new tools to be able to see government differently. So it strikes me that part of the work that goes on here....

Because we are the largest employer in the country, because we are the largest organization in the country, because we have 119 separate organizational entities—actually, 160, or maybe 247, depending on who's counting—and because we have fifteen different financial administration systems and six different human resource systems, and policy structures and legislation, some of which is very old, what we have is this broadly disaggregated organization that helps to bring order to this very disparate set of management tools and institutions, might make it easier for the government to respond to policy improvements for the disabled community, and might make it easier for the disabled community to understand what we're about.

So a piece of legislation, unlike the U.S. model, which triggers a bunch of contestable entitlements, bringing together something that helps to bring order to this very disparate set of management tools and institutions, might make it easier for the government to respond to policy improvements for the disabled community, and might make it easier for the disabled community to understand what we're about.

The problem—and you see a lot of it here, with a lot of this stuff—is mapping, showing you how to get around the place. We can do that by bringing mapping tools to it, which they're doing very creatively. Some of this stuff on the Internet is state-of-the-art. But we might make it easier by just reconfiguring the organizations a little bit, at least the policy access points.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Put the patchwork together.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Yes. It's hard to manage what you can't see.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Yes.

I've been reading too many of your speeches, and looking at too many things here—

Hon. Reg Alcock: Please, I'll sign them for you. Do you want a picture, perhaps?

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Well, I don't know....

You talked about the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency, and you said that it provides financial and other types of support to the National Committee of Federal Public Servants with Disabilities. Could you provide me with some more information on the financial and other types of support you give this organization?

Hon. Reg Alcock: All right. I need a minion to come forward here and help me with this.

It's a detailed question; I'm in deep water here.

Mr. Wally Boxhill (Director, Employment Equity Division, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat) I'm Wally Boxhill, director of policy, planning and reporting for the employment equity branch of the agency.

We in fact work quite closely with the National Committee of Federal Public Servants with Disabilities. We collaborate in formulating their work program, and we have been providing financial support with respect to their congress, which will be held April 18 to 20 here in Ottawa. It's an important event for the committee, following up on Forum 2002, which was a gathering to basically position the issues. Their work program coincides with some of the elements we have been trying to discharge in building a more inclusive Public Service of Canada.

The support we have been providing includes logistical as well as financial support toward the congress. For example, as recently as last night I was trying to find mechanisms to provide them with support for webcasting of the congress during those three days.

We have sponsored the facilities within the public service at large. Several departments have stepped up to the plate, including the Department of Justice and Heritage Canada, to provide both financial and logistical support for the activities of the committee.

● (1925)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: How much would you spend during a year?

Mr. Wally Boxhill Over the last fiscal year, I would say it would be in the vicinity of about \$60,000 from the agency itself. There's a fair bit of in-kind support as well. For example, Canadian Heritage has released one of its employees to work full time on committee activities. The same has been done by Human Resources Development Canada. It has released one of its employees to work full time on the secretariat.

So in addition to the strong financial support of individual organizations that are contributing, there is a significant amount of in-kind support to the organization as well. Out of my budget, it's within the realm of about \$60,000 to date.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Minister, again, you talked about the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency, and I quote:

In addition, the agency works with the departments on our policy on the duty to accommodate persons with disabilities in the federal public service. The policy is now being strengthened to clarify accountability for its implementation and improve monitoring of results.

What accountability and monitoring concerns motivated this revision?

Hon. Reg Alcock: Well, you touch on an area that I think may turn out to be one of the more important reforms we are going through, and it really starts with the Public Service Modernization Act. It should be said that the agency is very new. It has been created to bring a focus to human resources management within government, but it also is built on a desire to develop a new human resources management system, in I think two or three important ways.

The first of these, the classic relationship with the public service, the bargaining relationship, the relationship of employees and their representatives, is by design being moved to a more collaborative form, with a lot earlier intervention, and a lot more discussion with employees around workplace issues.

Second, on the accountability model you touch on, one of the problems we have as a very large organization is that our attempt to have accountability is to prescribe in detailed policy suites...to describe behaviour in great detail. The problem there is that you get into situations where the process has just become too cumbersome, too slow, too hard to carry off effectively, and you often lose sight of what your outcome is.

So the goal in the public service human resource modernization is to define the expected outcomes and then hold the deputies and senior management teams accountable for delivering on those outcomes, to give it more flexibility in terms of how they deliver on that.

As I said, we have just begun this. Month over month, we are beginning to activate certain sections of the act as we get the training and awareness done. We're not fully active yet. But you could see a number of things, such as some of the issues around visible minorities in the public service, where we are below their appearance in the labour force. You could see an item of accountability for deputy ministers and departments who didn't meet that level, that one of the things they would be judged on would be their ability to do that. Another would be criteria around the accessibility of their workplaces.

How you define those as measures is right where we are right now. This is the discussion that is most active right now. It's a radical change in public management, and I suspect we will make a number of mistakes along the way, but I think it's a very important direction.

● (1930)

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Dhalla.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Thank you.

I just want to take the opportunity to thank the minister. I know he's been very passionate about some of these issues and in terms of implementing change within his respective departments. I think he's made significant progress in regard to that.

There are a couple of issues I want to bring up. During your speech, you spoke about the communications policy the government has in regard to federal institutions being able to provide, on request, information in a variety of formats to serve some of the diverse needs. You said that it was, I guess, implemented in 2002, and they're going to be doing a formal review of the policy five years after that, which would be 2007.

Is anything being done in the interim to sort of track the progress that's been taking place?

Hon. Reg Alcock: I don't know.

Is there annual monitoring of this?

Mr. Brian Biggar (Manager, Corporate Identity and Communications Policy, Strategic Policy and Communications, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat): I'm Brian Biggar, manager of corporate identity and communications policy at the Treasury Board Secretariat. I'll try to help you answer that question.

We have responsibilities for the communications policy. The policy requires departments to assess and to evaluate, every three years or so, the extent to which their management practices comply with the requirements of the policy. The policy is relatively new, so we haven't reached that three-year threshold yet, but when we do get the reviews in from departments, which should come in over the next year or so, we'll be looking closely at this issue.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: So there hasn't been anything else done in the interim to track.

Mr. Brian Biggar: No.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: The next question is for the minister, in regard to the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

It's been noted that disability has become perhaps one of the most common grounds for discrimination that has been filed with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Do you know, or are you aware of, how many of those complaints at the commission are actually from federal public servants?

Hon. Reg Alcock: I don't know the number. I suppose I could get it. I noted in my opening remarks that we actually have had a good working relationship with them, I believe commended recently for the fact that we don't...or with respect to accessibility of facilities...?

You may want to come up to the microphone here.

Mr. Blair James (Executive Director, Real Property and Material Policy Directorate, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat): I'm Blair James, and I'm responsible for real property policy, and responsible for the accessibility policy.

We've dealt with the Canadian Human Rights Commission in the context of revising the policy on accessibility. We met with them to go through and make sure that in fact they weren't receiving complaints that we weren't aware of. Hopefully, individual departments would react to complaints as they come by, of course, but we wanted to make sure that nothing had gone directly to the Human Rights Commission. At the time when we met with them, they said that in terms of federal facilities, there was nothing on the radar screen. And those were their words.

On that basis, in the revision to our policy, we are simplifying it and in fact invoking elements of the legislation, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and making it clear so that there's no confusion out there: all government departments need to follow the legislation as it is written by the Human Rights Commission.

As the minister said, we have a close working relationship. As far as we're concerned, if they're comfortable with the elements of their own legislation, we simply will now reference that in our revision to our policy to say that all departments are responsible for doing that.

Hon. Reg Alcock: That's not to say that there won't be or shouldn't be continuing challenges. I mean, this is an evolving area, and we are learning. *We* are learning as we work to provide greater accessibility, and I think the disabled community is also learning where the boundaries are, and are constantly challenging us to improve. So I think it's like any other human activity.

Mr. Blair James: If I may, we're also involved in universal design as well with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. We've been in touch with them, as late as this fall, in terms of updating the international best practices document that was prepared some time ago. We have entered into an arrangement between ourselves, the Human Rights Commission, and a lead department, in this case Agriculture Canada, to update the international best practices. We're contributing financially to the production of the final report, to the translation and that sort of thing.

So we deal with them in terms of that level just to make sure that if there's any way we could help promulgate what they see of interest, then we'll do so.

•(1935)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: And in terms of any other specific strategies being utilized within the departments to encourage the hiring of people with disabilities...?

Hon. Reg Alcock: Does anybody want to speak to the hiring?

Mr. Wally Boxhill: Our recent annual report, which the minister tabled before the House in mid-February, indicates that our recruitment rate has been fairly stable over the last couple of years. For persons with disabilities, it's in the vicinity of about 5.1%. I'll just verify that figure to make sure it's read into the record correctly.

In terms of overall recruitment of persons with disabilities, we'd like to improve our performance, but the major challenge, as the minister suggested, is with respect to visible minorities. What we've heard from the persons with disabilities community is that the principal challenge for them is with respect to accommodation. Our new policy that was promulgated in June 2002 is a significant step in strengthening our accommodation requirements. We are holding individual departments accountable for discharging on the accommodation requirements up to the point of undue hardship, under the law.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Just in closing, I want to thank the minister for his leadership. I know he has a tremendous amount of passion and sensitivity for the issue. It's appreciated.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I think in this case you could say my "followership".

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Your team.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I'm just smart enough to listen to them, that's all.

The Chair: Just as a point of information, I'm having trouble understanding the 5% difference versus what is showing here, that in 2003-04 the hiring of persons with disabilities was at 3.1%.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Wally, why don't you come and answer that. This is your area of expertise.

The 1% a year, in any given year, would not necessarily change the overall amount that's there. We don't hire everybody new each year. Once we've got somebody in, they stay in the service.

I don't know that a single-year figure makes all that big a difference, does it, Wally?

Mr. Wally Boxhill: That's what I was checking; as I said, I'll make sure that I get the correct figure in terms of the recruitment of persons with disabilities. Now, 5.1% came to mind, but I just need to double-check to make sure that I quoted the right figure in terms of the recruitment.

Hon. Reg Alcock: That's the overall appearance of people with disabilities in the federal labour force. I think what the chairman is referencing is that he has a figure there that says in a particular year people with disabilities made up only 1% of the new hires.

Is that right, Ken?

The Chair: Yes. I'm getting mixed signals here. I was following Ruby's questioning, and I thought...but it's been pointed out to me that it's only 3.1%.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: That's just in regard to the hiring of individuals, the 3.1%, but then the question below just deals with the actual representation. In 2002 the actual representation was at 5.6%, and the initial hiring was at 3.1%.

Mr. Wally Boxhill: It is the representation figure that's just over 5%, not the hiring. The hiring is stabilized at around 3%.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Vincent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Minister, for attending this committee meeting.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank Mr. Prud'homme who came to one of our other meetings. I had asked that new signs be posted at the Confederation Building to indicate the location of the rear entrance for persons with disabilities, and these signs have indeed been posted. I think Mr. Prud'homme did an exceptional job in a short period of time and I want to thank him publicly.

For some time now, we have been targeting the public service. Do you feel that it's important to bring in an incentive program to encourage private sector employers to hire persons with disabilities? By incentive program, I mean a program that would provide direct financial support or compensation to the employer. We've been focussing only on the public service, but we could go one step further and help persons with disabilities find jobs by providing some financial assistance to employers. How do you feel about that suggestion?

•(1940)

[*English*]

Hon. Reg Alcock: While it has been a while since I worked directly in this area, I think in a number of the provinces, including in my own province of Manitoba, there are a number of programs. There are incentive programs for the hiring and training of people with disabilities, but equally importantly, there are support organizations, supported largely provincially but a bit federally, to constantly be designing solutions for people with significant disabilities, solutions that enable them to work with special tools and supports they might need within the work environment. It's not just accessibility but actually quite creative uses of computer programs and other tools. I know that both of those do receive a level of federal support, although the primary focus in those cases is with the provincial government.

Would I be supportive of programs that enhance this, that encourage it, that incent it in the private sector? Certainly. I think what you'll find, and Walter may want to correct me on this, is that in large companies that have the resource capabilities to provide some of the accommodation, you do see work going on to hire disabled individuals. I think it's a greater challenge for smaller companies that don't have the fiscal resources to do that. I can't speak for provinces other than my own, but I know that on the provincial side they have been quite creative in the support they've made available to businesses.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: I understand and that's all well and good. However, perhaps a federal-provincial agreement could be negotiated to support one or more jobs in industry for persons with disabilities. Could that option be considered? Is such an agreement already in place? I believe it was mentioned at one committee meeting that this type of program was in place in the United States and was proving to be quite successful in terms of finding employment for persons with disabilities. I'm wondering if a similar program could be introduced in this country?

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: I don't wish to make commitments for other ministers—my responsibilities are within the federal public service—but certainly I think that would be a conversation you might want to have with the minister for HRSD, for example, or even federal-provincial, and certainly Madam Robillard, who happens to be both, is someone you might have a very interesting discussion with.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: Mention was made of reasons for job discrimination against persons with disabilities. The document reports that 39% of persons have complained of discrimination. What was the nature of the complaints filed and were any resolved? We note in Table 3 of Appendix A at the end of the paper prepared by the Library of Parliament that in the past four years, the highest number of complaints of discrimination were filed in Ontario.

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: And these are private sector? These aren't federal public sector complaints, are they?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: It's simple to understand.

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: No, that's right, there's public here. So a total of 932 complaints, or 1,093 total allegations, with total employment-related at 161...?

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: The numbers are broken down by territory. I'm talking about the 630 complaints filed in Ontario.

•(1945)

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: I guess I'm looking at a different table.

Oops, what's this on the back? There's Ontario; gotcha.

The Chair: As a point of information, the public represents municipal, provincial, and federal.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Yes, I was going to say, I'm not disputing the numbers at all, but I'm not certain that they may be representative of the federal public service. It's always good to work with the same numbers, as Mr. Julian will attest.

The 630 is all complaints, period. If you go on the other side, on this table, it breaks them out into public and private. The public could be the provinces as well as the...so this would be all kinds of complaints, not just accessibility complaints.

I can't reconcile those numbers efficiently. If you like, we could undertake to try to get some more information back to you on this, but I don't think we're experiencing a high level of complaint, and for good reason. I mean, the federal government is being quite aggressive and quite active in this area. That's not to say that there isn't more that could be done by other programs that target the private sector or other levels of government.

Mr. Wally Boxhill: With the promulgation of our policy in 2002, we expected to see a spike in the discussion of accommodation requirements and issues. We have been attempting to resolve those before they reach the complaints stage. This is something we will be actively monitoring in the next year or so, to see the trend with respect to disability complaints generally within the public service.

In terms of the figures that are prepared by the Human Rights Commission, it appears as if there are general complaints that apply to public services in general, including at the provincial level and including complaints registered within the wider public sector, as distinct from the public service specifically. We need to make that distinction quite clearly.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: Perfect. Thank you

[English]

The Chair: Jean-Rodrigue, you may want to explain why we don't have a federal breakout. That would seem to be pretty germane to these questions.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré (Committee Researcher): These are the new numbers, not publicly released by the Human Rights Commission. We asked the commission to provide us with the most recent numbers on allegations of complaints from persons with disabilities. They told us that the number of complaints was much higher from persons with disabilities than from the other groups.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Did they also break them out in terms of federal, provincial, municipal, private sector?

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: They didn't give us precise numbers on the complaints from the federal public service, but we know there have been some. We just don't have the precise number.

Hon. Reg Alcock: To the extent to which we have knowledge of complaints, we could certainly gather that information and provide it to you. The advice we have is that it isn't that significant any more—which you would expect, given the amount of work and energy that's gone into this area.

The Chair: *Monsieur Julian, s'il vous plaît.*

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Alcock, for coming this evening. We have our differences, but—

Hon. Reg Alcock: I'm spending a lot of time with you, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, you are.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I hope it's enlightening you.

Mr. Peter Julian: I hope it's enlightening *you*.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I always am enlightened by these experiences.

Mr. Peter Julian: I would like to say that certainly I'm aware of the commitment you've had to disability issues, both in your pre-public life and also in your current political life. We appreciate your being here this evening.

[*Translation*]

So much for the bouquets. Now for the brickbats.

I'd like to get back to the matter of the complaints filed with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. If I understand correctly, you mentioned in your presentation that no complaint had been filed concerning the accessibility of federal buildings, that is the 40,000 federal buildings nationwide. Did I understand you correctly?

• (1950)

[*English*]

Hon. Reg Alcock: Actually, I think that's an important question, Mr. Julian. When we talk about 40,000 buildings, we are talking about, in some cases, munitions magazines, special-use army buildings—everything. You'll notice I said in my remarks that there are, in the policy, exceptions to the accessibility provisions, which would apply, for example, in a heritage building, where the modifications would destroy the character of the building and other accommodations are sought. We're constantly looking for the solutions.

I would be hard-pressed to say that all of those 40,000 federal buildings meet all the accessibility requirements, but I would think that all of those buildings that have public access or use, or people with disabilities working in them, would...

Now your head; don't let me get too far off, Rod.

I just want to be clear about this. I was astounded when I saw the number of 40,000, but when you look at what constitutes that, a big chunk of those are special-use buildings on army bases and so on.

Mr. Peter Julian: Fair enough, but I guess I question the fact that there have been no complaints related to federal real property subject to this policy. I know, because at this committee level we've had two discussions around accessibility issues. One was for the Office for Disability Issues in Gatineau. The second was actually around Confederation. Mr. Vincent brought this to the committee, with concerns around signage.

Having been aware, just in the few brief times we've met, of at least two cases that have come up, I guess I raise concerns about the fact that there have not been complaints, because I'm sure there have been. I'd be very interested, and I think the rest of the committee would be interested, in knowing just how many complaints may have come forward.

We could judge the effectiveness of the policy as to whether the complaints are going down or going up, but it seems to me quite impossible that there would be no complaints.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I accept that completely. In fairness, given the speed of my life these days, people have provided some notes for me here; I think the reference was more to formal complaints through

the Human Rights Commission and how the relationship with that had improved. That is not to say that there aren't always things that we need to be looking at, and people will be pointing things out to us on a regular basis, I would imagine, particularly in areas like the older buildings that we have in our portfolio.

Perhaps we can undertake to gather that information for you and make it available to the committee. To the best of our knowledge, the most useful.... There are two or three levels of complaint, including the formal complaint mechanism of the Human Rights Commission.

There would be other mechanisms where we would collect information like that, would there not?

Mr. Blair James: The minister is correct here. When we indicated that there were no complaints, these would be the formal complaints that make it to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Again, we specifically visited them in the preparation of a revised policy on accessibility, just to make sure that we weren't missing any areas that we should be concentrating on. They said they had no complaints, no formal complaints, to the commission.

Undoubtedly, there are complaints that are handled by individual departments, particularly Public Works. As the minister mentioned, we have 40,000 buildings, but the primary buildings that we are focusing on are buildings where we need to provide public access to, or use of, a federal facility. Those are office buildings, storefronts; I have no doubt there have been complaints.

We do have mechanisms to do that. I chair a committee of directors general responsible for property. We have raised the issue of accessibility within, I guess, the past three or four months. We had a discussion on changes that they thought may be necessary in revising our policy, and I have no problem raising with them, in the same forum, the number of complaints. If they do keep a formal record of it, we could certainly get that.

Mr. Peter Julian: Through any source.

Mr. Blair James: Absolutely. Again, these are the people who deal with the buildings on a daily basis, so they would be the ones who would get the complaints.

So I have no doubt there are complaints, and we'll commit to getting back to the committee with some numbers from those departments.

• (1955)

Hon. Reg Alcock: Was it Monsieur Vincent who pointed out the lack of signage in Confederation?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, and Ms. Skelton was the one who raised the issue around the accessibility for the Office for Disability Issues in Gatineau.

Hon. Reg Alcock: But it's interesting how we become more aware of this. I've been walking out of Confederation for 12 years and never noticed it, never thought about it. Part of this is that we become more aware of the range of what accessibility means. You think about it as a ramp, but it means more than that. It's just interesting, frankly, and I suspect we'll see more and more of those ideas as people's awareness of the need to, and how to, respond to it grows. So I think we would be very open to that.

Mr. Peter Julian: That's part of our job as well, to make sure that we're aware of what the issues are out there.

I'd like to come back to the Treasury Board real property accessibility policy. As I understand it from your remarks, there haven't been annual reports filed since 1995, which means, then, in a sense... We've already identified that there are issues, and even at this local committee level we've been aware of those issues. I guess I would like to make a pitch, or make a question, as to whether or not you would reconsider that, so that there is some annual reporting mechanism that allows us to integrate perhaps those complaints that haven't been formal through the Canadian Human Rights Commission but still indicate problems with accessibility.

Hon. Reg Alcock: As this committee goes further along in its work and forms an opinion on that, if that was something you thought would be worthwhile, we certainly would take that very seriously and look at mechanisms. There may be more interactive mechanisms also, where we can provide that information on an ongoing, evergreen basis rather than in an annual report. We are actually going to be coming forward with a bunch of recommendations....

We're looking at how we provide information to Parliament generally. So much of what we do is in these big, thick tomes that come at a particular time during the year. It may be possible, and in fact, some of the team working on this have some very creative ideas on how we could make information available as an ongoing stream. You could see your benchmarks in it but you could actually access it and see the latest figures.

In this area, if the committee thinks this would be useful, we would welcome your input on it. In fact, it might be interesting on this question to bring some of the reporting-to-Parliament folks down just to give you a sense of some of the things we're thinking about, and to hear what you might like to see in those reports.

Mr. Peter Julian: Let me move on to the next point. I have a few minutes left.

Hon. Reg Alcock: You're two for two so far. You're doing well.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you. I was doing well last night too.

Hon. Reg Alcock: We might differ on that. This is more your area, I think.

Mr. Peter Julian: I would disagree with that.

When we're talking about accessibility, in your remarks you addressed the issue of accessibility, particularly in communications for blind and visually impaired Canadians. We've talked about physically disabled Canadians. I do notice in both the parliamentary precinct buildings map and in your comments that you didn't address issues related to deaf, deafened, and hard-of-hearing Canadians. I'm thinking of access to TTY, access to amplified phones. It appears that there is certainly no provision for TTY or amplified phones on Parliament Hill, from the map that I see here.

I'm wondering what provisions there are here. What is the number of employees in your jurisdiction that are deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing? As well, what provision is made for their employment arrangements, including access to TTYs and interpreters, and what sort of physical infrastructure exists for deaf and hard-of-hearing Canadians in the property that's managed, through the policy?

Hon. Reg Alcock: It's interesting that, given that I started off working with the deaf community, you catch me a little bit with my collective pants down. I actually rented a TTY in my office for a long time and stopped doing it, because the deaf community has moved so quickly to the Internet and to short messaging and such that we just weren't getting any action on it. However, it's interesting that the augmented phones for the hard of hearing are useful; for the deaf, they're less so.

Do we have any figures on the deaf?

Go ahead, Wally.

• (2000)

Mr. Wally Boxhill: As part of our data collection activities in the self-identification process, we ask employees in the designated groups to specify subgroup information that includes the deaf and the hard of hearing. We do not normally produce those numbers, but we can share them with the committee.

The Human Rights Commission, for one, has said that there is no requirement under the Employment Equity Act to collect subgroup information, but we feel it's important to be able to know the types of services that may be required. We do collect that information, even though we do not publish it. We'd be happy to share that information with the committee.

Hon. Reg Alcock: The point Mr. Julian makes is interesting. We have actually outlined for people where they can get accessible washrooms and all of that, but we don't have any identification, for example, of augmented phones.

Mr. Peter Julian: I assume there aren't any, and that's why they're not identified.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Right, exactly. So we should look at that.

We don't have a sense of how many deaf or profoundly hard of hearing people work for the public service?

Mr. Wally Boxhill: No, we do. As I said, we'll be providing that information to the committee. We never publish it because there's no requirement to publish it under the employment equity legislation, but we do collect it as a matter of course.

We would be happy to share that with the committee.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I think Gary Malkowski is here tomorrow, isn't he?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Mr. Julian.

Hon. Reg Alcock: By the way, I came late, so I'm prepared to stay a little longer as long as people have questions.

The Chair: We usually go around again.

Hon. Reg Alcock: I'm enjoying this relationship with Mr. Julian; I mean, keep it going.

Mr. Peter Julian: It's temporary, unfortunately.

Hon. Reg Alcock: No, I don't think it is. I think we're establishing a new benchmark here, Mr. Julian.

The Chair: It's a stellar example of cordiality.

I won't take up my full 10 minutes here. In the Treasury Board itself, when the reviews come for projects and programs, is it the attitude as opposed to the policy to be receptive to those concerns for improving the accessibility in all facets? Can you say that's the operating philosophy of your department?

Hon. Reg Alcock: Well, I would like to say that this is exactly the case. I think the thing that makes me most proud of what happens at Treasury Board on a range of these issues—and this is as good an example as any—is that at the Treasury Board and its different groupings, such as the public service, the human resources agency, etc., there are pockets of creative, smart, interesting people all over the place who are working away on these things. All we have to do is just give them the means to do it.

I don't want you to think this is some big initiative that's been led by me as some spear carrier here. This was going on long before I became Treasury Board president. I think it represents a much larger commitment by the Government of Canada, the House of Commons, and Canadians in general to see that these things are corrected. We just happen to have acquired a large number of people who are pretty thoughtful and pretty smart on this.

I think your point, Mr. Chairman, about leadership is an important one. This area requires some funding. It requires physical modifications to buildings. It requires a lot of thought. On the policy development side, the universal design program was mentioned. It's really saying to us that we have to clean up areas where our buildings are not accessible, where don't have the tools, where we have to go back and retrofit and so on. But let's try to get it into our policy structures, any time we're going forward, that we're going forward on as broad and as thoughtful a way as possible so that we're not creating new barriers and new problems.

I think that's a representation of the collective work of the disabled community, which in my experience has become an awful lot more organizationally competent and drives its own bus now in ways it never used to do. There is a recognition on the part of politicians from all parties that this is an important community whose resources need to be accessed; it's a creative group of people who spend their working lives thinking about these things.

So I think it's a pretty good combination.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Skelton, do you have any supplemental questions?

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Yes, I do.

You were talking about working with the new groups and everything. The thing that popped into my mind is something that I've always been very concerned about, and that's emergency measure plans and everything.

Would all your buildings in Canada and all your departments have emergency measures planned for the disabled along with all the other employees in the departments?

● (2005)

Hon. Reg Alcock: Blair, do you want to comment on the specifics?

Mr. Blair James: It is a policy requirement that there are emergency evacuation plans completed by all government departments. Part of the emergency evacuation plan would contain a section on disabled persons within the organization.

In the past month I have hosted two separate sessions, one with custodial departments, or the departments that actually own the buildings, and a separate session with agencies who are tenants in the buildings, on that specific issue, on emergency evacuation plans. I think about 50% of the presentation was on how to deal with persons with disabilities and to make sure that there are monitors identified to in turn make sure that the emergency officials are notified when you reach the building.

So not only is it in the policy, but again, we've taken an initiative just over the past month to make sure that public service employees and those who control the operations in buildings are aware of their responsibilities in that area.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: How about the buildings on the Hill? Do we have plans for all of those?

Mr. Blair James: I can't speak to the Hill. Unfortunately, Parliament Hill is not—

Hon. Reg Alcock: We didn't go there.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Sorry; forgot about that.

Hon. Reg Alcock: We've got the Board of Internal Economy. We'll provide them with lots of advice on policy, if they want.

Mr. Blair James: Actually, one of my colleagues has additional information on this.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Okay, good. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Prud'homme (Director, Parliament Precinct, Real Property Branch, Department of Public Works and Government Services): Good afternoon. My name is Serge Prud'homme and I work for Public Works and Government Services Canada.

As far as Parliament Hill is concerned, there is a clear plan in place for each organization. Measures have been taken to ensure that persons with disabilities are identified and their needs attended to in all buildings.

[*English*]

Hon. Reg Alcock: What he said.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you very much. It's just that I have never seen one. As a member of Parliament on the Hill, I haven't got a clue what we are supposed to do, because there hasn't been a fire alarm or anything since I got here. In school or something, we've done our practising, but here we are, and I've never seen a plan, when I know that I might have to help some of my colleagues or something.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Prud'homme: I can provide you with a copy of these plans. The information sheet distributed to all MPs should be part of this pamphlet. I'll check with my colleagues at the House of Commons to ensure that this information is included in the next newsletters.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Thank you.

The Chair: Dr. Dhalla.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: I'm fine.

The Chair: Monsieur Vincent.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: I have one last question along the same lines as that of Ms. Skelton. Are evacuation drills conducted yearly in all government buildings located off the Hill?

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: Just thinking of Mrs. Skelton's question, I have been through a few of them in the 12 years I've been here, but I don't know if they were ever organized. They happen, but I don't recall... Maybe the ones that happened were organized and planned. I would assume that they would have a policy of that sort, but I don't know. We could get you that information. I know we all end up outside on bad days every now and again, but I don't know whether that was part of a drill or part of something smoking somewhere.

Do you only hold them on the days when we're not there?

I'll get you an answer on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Vincent: I'm asking if evacuation drills are conducted at least once a year in government buildings located off the Hill, so that people know which exit to use and what procedures to follow?

• (2010)

[English]

Hon. Reg Alcock: I think they're very advanced, very complete plans, and they're done more than yearly. I know in the building I used to inhabit at Treasury Board, they were testing the system at inopportune moments every Friday for some time, with, I would assume, weekly or monthly drills.

Mr. Blair James: There are mandatory requirements under the Canada Labour Code for buildings with a certain number of people in them. For example, you mentioned schools. Schools have to do it four times a year, by law. For office buildings, depending on the number of people, it's one time a year, or every six months.

This is all prescribed and part of the fire evacuation plan. The fire plan for each government office building would have requirements in there outlining how many times each year you need to do this.

Hon. Reg Alcock: What about that ghastly announcement that goes on Friday afternoon during meetings?

Mr. Blair James: That's a requirement as well, to test the fire evacuation system. That has to be done on a weekly basis.

Again, this stuff is not made up. It's in legislation. It's in law. It lays out a schedule, depending on the size of the building, the type of

the building, whether or not it's an office building versus a warehouse or a school. We simply follow federal legislation in that case.

The Chair: Monsieur Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I just have a last question regarding the executives in the public service.

You mentioned in your remarks that almost 5% of all executives in the public service are persons with disabilities. In the notes we received from the Library of Parliament, it mentioned that no persons with disabilities were hired in the executive category in 2002.

Now, one does not contradict the other necessarily, but what exactly is the recruitment and retention rate among executives in the public service, and what would be the character of their disabilities, when we look at the disability spectrum?

Hon. Reg Alcock: Psychological disorders...?

Mr. Peter Julian: No, that's cabinet.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wally Boxhill: When we report on hirings into the public service, including in the executive category, we're looking at the recruitment of persons from outside the public service, persons who were added to the public service payroll. I do not have the actual figures for the year to which you refer, but most of our executives are homegrown. They move from within the public service.

As committee members, you're probably well aware that many disabilities are commensurate with age. Our executives tend to be older, so we would expect to see most of our executives, again, coming from within the public service as opposed to being recruited from outside.

In terms of types of disabilities, we may not be able to get the information at the time of recruitment, whether people were mobility impaired or were blind or were hard of hearing. The self-identification process through which we gather that information is ongoing, and people are permitted to self-identify at any point in their career. So I think it's virtually impossible for us to determine whether it was done at the beginning or subsequent to the individual being hired into the public service.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'm just trying to square the knot, no one being hired in the executive category. Is what you're saying that there would be people with disabilities who would be—

Mr. Wally Boxhill: Promoted from within.

Mr. Peter Julian: And that does not contradict the statistics and the report we received.

I'm looking at Mr. Paré.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: I have the 2003 annual report from the Human Rights Commission, which says that no persons with disabilities were hired in the executive category in 2002. It's right on page 35 of that report.

Mr. Wally Boxhill: Again, that definition of hiring means being brought in from outside the public service. It does not mean that nobody was added to the executive category. People could have moved from the executive feeder group in the public service into the executive category. So we would see numbers reflected in the growth of the executive category even though that was not fueled by people being brought in from outside.

Mr. Peter Julian: Could you share these figures with the committee?

Mr. Wally Boxhill: On the promotions? That actually would be in our annual report.

• (2015)

Hon. Reg Alcock: Certainly, if you require more information, if we've got it, you're welcome to it.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Jean-Rodrigue Paré: You want the numbers?

Mr. Peter Julian: If you could circulate them to the committee, that would be fine. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. We really appreciate your time. We know what your schedule is like.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Let me just close by repeating what I said at the beginning, that I think the work you do is important, as is the fact that you take time to think about these issues. We will provide any information we have or any support you need. If you simply request it, we'll make it available. I look forward to the results of this work.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

At this time, members of committee and the audience, we will suspend the meeting to go in camera for a discussion. I would like to thank everyone who attended tonight for their participation.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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