

The second reading of the Accessible Act in the Senate

# Accessible Canada Bill

## Second Reading—Debate Adjourned

**Hon. Jim Munson** moved second reading of Bill C-81, An Act to ensure a barrier-free Canada.

He said: Honourable senators, I rise to begin debate at second reading on Bill C-81. However, before I get into the formalities of my debate, imagine as an Ottawa senator, I will now get to skate to work. Living in town, how Canadian is that, eh? And in the springtime, when the ice breaks, I'll be able to canoe to work. I don't know how many Canadians can do that.

As I walked into this architectural gem of a building this morning and I looked at our new surroundings, I was in awe. Even after 15 years in the Senate, I'm still in awe. This is an old train station. It has so much history. You can close your eyes and just imagine troops leaving here in 1940 or leaving here in 1915 for the First World War, or the arrival in 1939 of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. Winston Churchill arrived at the train station as did the Queen of Figure Skating, Barbara Ann Scott, and the King of Rock and Roll, Elvis Presley, all arrived at this place. Also, imagine visitors arriving to see Parliament Hill for the first time and people arriving to live here in this great city.

Of course, when the station closed, it became another meeting place, the Government Conference Centre. I can't think of how time has passed so fast that the constitutional talks were in this building. At the patriation of the Constitution, I was a young reporter and I never thought — it wasn't part of the game plan — that I'd be back as a senator in what we call the Senate of Canada Building.

So history has been made here and it's my sincere hope that history will be made again with Bill C-81, the Accessible Canada Bill.

Honourable senators, just as the cornerstone was placed when this magnificent building was being constructed from 1909 to 1912, today we as senators are laying a new cornerstone to build a barrier-free Canada. That is why I'm pleased to rise as sponsor of Bill C-81, An Act to ensure a barrier-free Canada, also known as the Accessible Canada Bill.

Now, before I proceed, I would like to acknowledge the work of Carla Qualtrough, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, as well as persons with disabilities who have been engaged on this bill at every stage. Like the Speaker, I particularly want to thank members of the Federal Accessibility Legislation Alliance, FALA, who are here with us and who have been providing input on this act from its early stages. They represent 87 partner organizations and 92 individual members, with a total of 179 people involved all across this country. I know several senators have had the opportunity to meet with them, and I'm sure we will be meeting with you again over the next few weeks and months.

(1640)

A quote from Gillian Lynne-Davies of FALA — you'll get to hear that word for a long time:

People with disabilities are waiting for a strong and effective Accessible Canada Act. We have waited a very, very long time. We look forward to continuing our conversations with senators and working together to make a truly accessible and inclusive Canada from which all Canadians can be proud and benefit.

I thank those senators who have already met members of this alliance. I hope more senators will meet them to understand the work of this bill.

Honourable senators, persons with disabilities want to be part of an active society, but every day, barriers prevent persons with disabilities from participating fully and equally in communities and workplaces. The message that sends is "You don't fit in. There is no place for you. Step aside or stay at home." It is clear that the need to change how barriers to accessibility are addressed in this country is long overdue.

Senators, no one group should have to fight to enjoy the full rights of citizenship. We need to send the message that persons with disabilities are valued civic, social and economic contributors to Canadian society, because they are. With the proposed accessible Canada act, persons with disabilities will not be systematically denied opportunities for inclusion anymore.

Before I go further, I would like to acknowledge all the work done to get Bill C-81 this far. It is the product of real collaboration and consultations. As I mentioned, it includes the efforts of the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, as well as input from the members of the other chamber, from all parties, who worked to study and strengthen this bill through debate, study and amendments. In fact, in the other place, 74 amendments were accepted. I'm sure, given the way we work here, there will be new amendments to improve the bill and just make it work for the country and for the disability community.

I'm very proud to sponsor this bill, which passed with all parties supporting the spirit of the legislation in the other place. I've been looking forward to reigniting that spirit here in the Senate. I'm grateful to have that opportunity today.

Senators, I know this bill is important to the disability community. They have been waiting for this for far too long. We have the opportunity to contribute to establishing a Canada that is accessible and inclusive for everyone through Bill C-81. There is no doubt in my mind that this is a bill we can all get behind, and that it will make Canada a better place for persons with disabilities. Canadians are counting on us to get the job done. This, honourable senators, is not about politics. This is about people. This is about inclusion.

The accessible Canada act represents a historic milestone for disability rights in Canada. Senators, our country has a strong legislative framework that guarantees equal rights for all. Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms establishes that each and every person in Canada, regardless of race, religion, national or ethnic origin, colour, sex, age or physical or mental disability is to be considered equal, meaning that governments cannot discriminate on any of these grounds in its laws or programs.

Persons with disabilities who feel they have been discriminated against can turn to the Canadian Human Rights Act, instated in 1977, to defend themselves against harassment or discrimination based upon physical or mental disability. Together, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act are the two main judicial tools at the disposal of Canadians with disabilities to protect themselves from discrimination.

It's also important to mention that since 2010, Canada has been the signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which complements Canada's existing protection for the equality and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities.

Honourable senators, Canada has also acceded to the Marrakesh Treaty in 2016, which aims to improve access to published works for persons with print disabilities by offering the material in Braille and audiobooks.

However, protecting persons against discrimination is not necessarily just facilitating accessibility. It is one thing to say, "You have the right to go into this building." It is another to build a ramp so that persons in wheelchairs can physically go into the building. It is one thing to say, "You have the right to read government publications." It is another to make these publications accessible so that persons with visual impairments can read them.

Even though Canada has a strong legislative framework that guarantees the equal rights of persons with disabilities, we still see significant barriers to accessibility. The accessible Canada act sets out to change that and create a Canada that is inclusive and accessible for everyone from the get-go. Senators, this is our opportunity to be part of the most significant advancement for disability rights in this country in over 30 years.

At second reading, we are looking at the principle of the legislation, so allow me to give an overview. In brief, I would like to talk about how the accessible Canada act requires organizations and branches of governments under federal jurisdiction to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility for everyone in this country. As I just mentioned, it builds on the existing rights for persons with disabilities under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Human Rights Act, and is a significant step in the ongoing implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

When enacted, this bill intends for our country to take a proactive approach to ensuring accessibility. As I explained earlier, even though Canada has a very robust human rights system, it is, by nature, a reactive one. Persons with disabilities have to be denied a service, program, job or housing before the system starts rolling. And then it is the responsibility of the individual to make the system respond. That's just not right.

Now, I had the opportunity — and she is here today — to meet with Diane Bergeron, Vice President of Engagement and International Affairs at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. She's in the gallery with my favourite dog, Lucy. Lucy is very quiet but she's here. I think it's a first for the Senate. We're going to talk about firsts in this speech. I think this is so important. I want to thank Lucy and Diane for coming. She told me that this legislation would be a big leap forward. She stated in a press release from CNIB:

Canada's disability community has been waiting a long time for this. I am thrilled this legislation promotes and builds proactive compliance activities rather than forcing people with disabilities to bring forward barriers and discrimination.

I think just for a small start, senators, we have our business cards. How many senators have Braille on their business cards? There are a few. We have to get with it. We have to show that we are leaders as an organization. We should all have Braille cards to use in this new world of inclusion.

With Bill C-81, the government would be able to proactively and systematically address barriers to accessibility before they happen. This bill would put the responsibility for accessibility on the system and avoid forcing persons with disabilities to suffer discrimination before having their rights rightfully restored.

Let me give you an example from the autism community here in Ottawa that came to my office from a father whose son has autism. The online banking barrier for Canadians with autism is one that originates, essentially, with poor formatting. To make a website accessible for everyone doesn't mean that it will change the way all Canadians do their online banking. It means that the website is set up so that it can be perceived, understood, navigated and interacted with by all who scroll onto it. What does online banking accessibility for person with autism look like? It looks like labels on all form fields, same page shortcut links to documents, a keyboard accessible drop-down menu that

supports arrow keys in addition to tabs and using colour in conjunction with other visual indicators, such as an asterisk or parenthesis.  
(1650)

The accessibility act will eliminate all these barriers. Standards will be created to oblige banks to have their websites meet a specific standard of accessibility. This young man will be able to access his bank account from home. Remember, banks will come under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

Senators, it's a small thing, but when you face barriers every day, it can give a person a sense of independence, success and accomplishment to do their own banking. Things we take for granted are the barriers people are up against every day.

Thanks to Bill C-81 and the proposals in it, persons with disabilities would have greater opportunities to participate in communities and the workplace. It would improve access to jobs and secure better jobs, facilitate travel and communication, and provide equal access to products, programs and services.

Bill C-81 would lead to the establishment of accessibility standards in the areas of employment, the built environment, information and communication technologies, the design and delivery of programs and services, communication and transportation.

It would apply to all areas under federal jurisdiction. This includes right here in the Senate, our Parliament, the Government of Canada, Crown corporations and federally regulated entities, including organizations in the federal transportation, telecommunications, broadcasting and banking sectors.

Honourable senators, Bill C-81 would significantly transform how Canada addresses accessibility and allow for a fundamental shift in the way the Government of Canada does business.

The principles set out in Bill C-81 highlight the intentions that guided the development of the bill, ensuring that the same principles are followed in the carrying out of this legislation. These principles state that all persons must be treated with dignity regardless of their disabilities. All persons must have the opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have. All persons must have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society. All persons must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices with support if they desire. Laws, policies, programs, services and structures must take into account the disabilities of persons and the different ways that persons interact with their environments. Persons with disabilities must be involved in their development or design. Accessibility standards must be developed and revised with the aim of achieving the highest level of accessibility for persons with disabilities.

As framework legislation, Bill C-81 establishes a system that would outlast any one government, providing for accessibility for generations to come.

As senators, we know that accountability and transparency are at the heart of good governance. So Bill C-81 stresses the need for strong reporting requirements. It is essential that federally regulated entities report publicly on what they are doing to improve accessibility. The legislation would require all branches of government, departments and organizations to develop accessibility plans, feedback mechanisms and progress reports.

In order to instill a cultural change that puts accessibility at the forefront, organizations would have to create, publish and regularly update accessibility plans in consultation with persons with disabilities. These plans would describe their strategies for improving accessibility and meeting their

legal obligations under the proposed act. They would also have to be published and available to the public.

Also, regulated entities would have to take the bill's principles into account when they develop their accessibility plans. This is to ensure that these plans are good plans, developed effectively and consistently with the disability community's principle of "nothing about us, without us," which defines the government's approach to accessibility.

In terms of feedback mechanisms, Bill C-81 would require organizations, branches of government, to set up to receive and respond to feedback regarding their accessibility from employees, customers and anyone who interacts with their organization.

The legislation also requires organizations to report on their progress as they implement their accessibility plans.

In consultation with persons with disabilities, organizations would have to prepare and publish progress reports that detail how they are fulfilling their accessibility plans and addressing any feedback they have received.

Together, these three reporting requirements in Bill C-81 would contribute, as I mentioned before, to that cultural shift in the way organizations approach and ensure accessibility in their operations. The duty will be on them to be proactive on accessibility rather than the current system, which puts all of the burden on the individual facing barriers, as I said in my example earlier.

Honourable senators, accessibility is about inclusion. It is more than a ramp. It includes attitudes, training and an awareness of individual needs, not simply physical space. Inclusion means every person has the possibility to participate fully and equally in all social processes, right from the beginning. That's why the continued and meaningful participation by persons with disabilities is crucial towards realizing a barrier-free Canada.

There are some really fundamentally good things in this bill. I want to explain briefly what they are.

The government will ensure that Canadians with disabilities are in control of setting accessibility standards through a new Canadian accessibility standards development organization, or CASDO. It will be led by a chief executive officer.

CASDO would be Canada's first standards development organization exclusively dedicated to developing accessibility standards. It would allow Canada to be proactive and to become a national and global leader on accessibility.

In addition, it would also be led by a board of directors composed of majority representation of persons with disabilities. This means that not only would persons with disabilities be part of the process; they would lead it. They would have the majority when setting the strategic direction for CASDO, when supervising and managing its activities and when advising the chief executive officer.

Throughout the standards development process, CASDO would work alongside persons with disabilities to ensure that standards account for their needs and priorities. Standards would be developed by technical committees composed of experts, persons with disabilities and representatives from sectors or organizations that in turn would have to meet the standards.

CASDO is one of the key provisions of this approach that will reflect the perspectives of persons with disabilities. In particular, the organization exemplifies the commitment to putting persons with disabilities at the heart of the process.

Honourable senators, with Bill C-81, Canada would no longer rely on individual persons with disabilities to fix the system. Instead, proactive compliance measures will ensure that organizations under federal jurisdiction are held accountable for their accessibility in partnership with Canadians with disabilities.

To this end, Bill C-81 will establish new entities and strengthen existing mandates to monitor outcomes effectively on accessibility and support meaningful progress.  
(1700)

How will this happen? A new accessibility commissioner within the Canadian Human Rights Commission will spearhead the compliance and enforcement for accessibility under this bill and related regulations.

The commissioner will be responsible for enforcement in areas such as employment, for example, the non-passenger built environment, person at the train station but not quite on the train yet, and communication as it relates to those areas. As well, the commissioner will oversee compliance and enforcement across most of the federal sector, including the Armed Forces, the RCMP, Parliament, as well as Crown corporations such as Canada Post, banks and the Government of Canada as a whole. This includes the Canada Revenue Agency and Service Canada.

The Canadian Transportation Agency will retain its responsibility for compliance and enforcement activities within the federally regulated transportation sector. They will build upon their existing expertise through enhanced powers which will allow them to effectively enforce and ensure accessibility within their sector, and also be responsible for making regulations pertaining to its accessibility authorities under this act.

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, CRTC, will be responsible for most accessibility compliance and enforcement activities and complaints for federally regulated broadcasters and telecommunications providers. Like the CTA, the CRTC will make regulations pertaining to its accessibility authorities under this act.

Bill C-81 ensures that entities are equipped with the tools and powers they need to effectively monitor and ensure compliance and enforcement under this act. This includes inspections and audits to verify compliance, and a progressive suite of tools, including orders and warnings, compliance audits, and monetary penalties of up to \$250,000.

The CHRC, CTA and CRTC are existing regulators; they are already in place and they are equipped with significant expertise on their respective sectors. They are already working to ensure they will be ready to fulfill their responsibilities for accessibility under Bill C-81.

Now, this is a whole-of-government approach. It recognizes that accessibility is everyone's responsibility.

The legislation also includes mechanisms designed to ensure coordination and oversight across the multiple agencies. It's what's called the "no wrong door" approach, which will ensure coordination so that complaints will always end up at the right door, the right place.

In addition, the new position of chief accessibility officer would report to the minister responsible for accessibility and would be responsible for ensuring, monitoring and oversight of any emerging issues or trends related to accessibility.

By integrating accessibility into existing systems and across all sectors under federal jurisdiction, Bill C-81 would build awareness and capacity for a culture that is truly inclusive and accessible, a culture that is long overdue.

Honourable senators, involving Canadians with disabilities and including them in decisions that affect their lives is one of the key principles of the legislation.

This means respecting the disability community's principle — I can't help but overemphasize this — of "nothing about us without us," at every stage of the bill. To support the development of Bill C-81, the Government of Canada led the largest and most accessible and inclusive consultations on disability issues to date. From June 2016 to February 2017, the government heard from over 6,000 Canadians across the country about what accessibility really means to them.

I attended a full-day seminar a year ago at Carleton University with young people from coast to coast. The ideas that came from this, came from up here in our guest chamber, are in this bill. Many things that came from those consultations are in this bill. Could there be a lot more? Of course there could be, but this is what input is all about, 6,000 people. When I was at Carleton, I was moved probably every 30 seconds by what students had to say to each other in terms of wanting inclusion and being included in the discussion.

Honourable senators, Bill C-81 is the product of constructive work between the federal government, stakeholders, persons with disabilities and all Canadians who have strongly advocated for making this legislation a reality.

The disability community, in particular, was willing to engage in the consultations since day one. Their involvement continues, and I'm sure it will continue when we get this to committee.

I really want to thank you for being here. Thanks to the inclusive leadership of organizations like the Federal Accessibility Legislation Alliance, FALA, Canadians with disabilities are having their voices heard. The disability community is helping to shape this historic legislation, which would not be possible without them.

Bill C-81 would enshrine into law the long-standing demand of the disability community that persons with disabilities need to be involved in the creation and implementation of the policies and programs that affect their lives. This is something I learned over 15 years in the Senate working in the autism community, self-advocacy. They know a lot better than we do of what they need and we have to follow them. They don't have to follow us; we have to learn. By doing this, Bill C-81 recognizes that an accessible Canada will only be possible with the collaboration and leadership of Canadians with disabilities.

In fact, the priorities and perspectives of the disability community are reflected throughout the bill, as I mentioned. They mention the importance of accessibility in communications, particularly for persons with communications and language disabilities. So communications was added as a priority for the legislation, to ensure this bill aligns with the priorities expressed by the disability community. Bringing focus to barriers in accommodations and supports for people with communications disabilities, and for people who are deaf is important to all service areas like face-to-face interaction, telecommunications, reading and writing. As you can imagine, this is a very important addition for people who face these barriers to interact in their communities and participate in the workplace.

Other suggestions from stakeholders highlighted the importance of harmonizing accessibility requirements across Canada. Another improvement was made so the bill now requires the minister responsible under the act to make every reasonable effort to collaborate with provinces and territories on accessibility.

It will also be helpful for the private sector to catch on once this bill becomes law.

This will help to create consistent levels of accessibility for persons with disabilities across Canada.

The community also wanted transparency and accountability on exemptions. To this end, the bill requires exemptions to be published in the *Canada Gazette*, as well as rationales for all exemptions must be made available to the public.

To enhance accountability, and there were concerns about timelines, the bill places a three-year limit on all exemptions. This recognizes that accessibility solutions evolve over time and will prevent organizations from slipping through the cracks, while also ensuring that everybody does their part to achieve an accessible Canada.

The community wants to make sure there will be no delays in implementation, particularly with respect to regulations. For that reason, the bill now requires that the first regulations under the act must be made within two years of the act coming into force. This also ensures that the first parliamentary review of this act will happen by 2026.

Colleagues, over my last 15 years in the Senate, what I've heard from the disability community is that they want something we all want: Equality. They want hope. They want a Canadian society that includes them. People with disabilities have been waiting a very long time for change. They want an accessible Canada to become a reality and they want it to happen quickly. Recognizing this, the government has a plan in place to ensure timely and meaningful progress in the implementation of this act.

My sincere hope is we get through this and when we have Royal Assent before we rise in June, that the Government of Canada will begin work on three key components of the legislation. These include the recruitment of the chief accessibility officer; the establishment of CASDO, the Canadian accessibility standards development organization; and the recruitment of the CASDO board of directors.

(1710)

The new organizations established under this act will be up and running within 12 months after the bill receives Royal Assent. The first set of regulations must be made within two years of the act coming into force. The establishment of these regulations will also start the clock for the five-year parliamentary review.

Additionally, Employment and Social Development Canada will establish initial regulations in the priority areas, based on recognized and established standards developed and validated over years by technical experts, industry and persons with disabilities. These short-term milestones mean that action towards an accessible Canada will start immediately.

Disabilities are as unique as the individual. There will always be new barriers to address, because we do not know what the barriers of tomorrow will look like. I'm sure in the construction of this building that we met all the standards, but I guarantee that in 24 hours we'll still find something to make this a better place. It just works that way. We are evolving as a society and our approach to remove barriers must evolve as well. That is why the participation of persons with disabilities through CASDO is going to be so important. We can never stop working towards everyone's accessibility.

In closing, senators, I know it's late in the day, but it's never too late to talk about inclusion. I am strongly committed to building a more inclusive and accessible society for all persons in Canada. I hope we can give this landmark legislation the priority and attention it deserves and have it passed into law, as I mentioned, before we leave this place in the summer.

I know this bill will improve the lives of millions of people in Canada, and it will establish Canada as a global leader in accessibility. With Bill C-81, we will lay the groundwork for a future that is inclusive of everyone and accessible to all people in Canada.



Honourable senators, in closing, it may sound unusual, but it is about history, so I'm dedicating this speech to my late son, Timothy James Alexander Munson. He was a child with Down's syndrome who wasn't quite a year old when he died, but he lived on this earth for a reason. Even then, 50 years ago, my wife and I were on a journey to break down barriers, the barriers of stigmatization, the barriers of language being used to describe a child with Down's syndrome, and the barriers of what kind of world a child with Down's syndrome can live and work in.

I was thinking what the world would have looked like 50 years later for Timmy.

Honourable senators, when we talk about inclusion, we are talking about passing the accessible Canada act into law. I'm doing it for Timmy and his spirit, and I'm doing it for every Canadian in the disability movement. There is nothing about us without us. Thank you very much.

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Senator Munson, will you take a question?

**Senator Munson:** Yes.

**Hon. Mobina S. B. Jaffer:** Senator Munson, I recognize the important work you have done in this area. I don't see one day when you do not work on breaking down barriers, and I want to say that the recognition you received today is because of the work not only for Timmy but you've done it for many Timmys. I think we would all agree that you have done tremendous work to break down barriers, and we thank you for that.

I hear the things you are saying, and unfortunately I am now one of those people who has issues and needs help. In all that you have said, will there be an awareness campaign so that employers know what will happen? It's great to have it as legislation, but what steps will be taken to implement it? What steps will be taken to raise awareness?

**Senator Munson:** Thank you, senator, for your kind words.

I do understand that the government plans a very strong campaign, but I think before you get there, you have to get the bill to become law.

Again, when you're doing a campaign, it has to involve the folks who are with us today, watching us at work, because they have to have the input of how they want to see how this campaign would work. There also has to be a campaign and consultation with the Indigenous communities, which I understand is going on now in terms of inclusivity. That has to be nation to nation and it has to take place as well.

It's a step-by-step process. I only have two and a half years to go here, which I can't believe. However, when the communications plan is put together, I'd like to be a part of it. I'd like to be Jimmy Appleseed and go across the country and talk everywhere. I don't think any door would close. I would hope not.

There have been conversations about a very strong communications campaign, but it has to have and will have the input of the disability community.

**Hon. Frances Lankin:** Senator Munson, will you accept another question?

**Senator Munson:** Yes.

**Senator Lankin:** Let me, first of all, thank you for your leadership on this bill and in general on these issues of inclusion. I did not know your personal story about Timmy, but thank you for sharing that.

Certainly part of his legacy is the ongoing legacy you have worked on with respect to bringing these issues forward. It's incredible, and I appreciate your sharing that with us.

I want to tell you that we will be contacting your office because we are in conversations about holding a panel discussion with people from the disability community to talk about this bill, to which we're going to invite all senators. I've been in conversations, or my office has, with some of the advocates from Ontario, because of my background and working on the Ontarians with Disability Act, which is woefully inadequate – was then and is more so now this many years later – but it is very instructive. I was interested in your comment about urging the minister to work across Canada to develop comprehensive and comparable standards.

Do you have an in-depth analysis of the differences, jurisdiction to jurisdiction, provincially and territorially and what this federal act will do? That could be very helpful for all of us back in our home communities in working with people from the community to be able to contrast.

The other lessons learned will be all of the remarks that will come about this being too costly and that we can't do this. In fact, I think that has been laid to rest by the experience in some of the provinces that went earlier than others and certainly by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Could you provide us with some of that information if you have it?

**Senator Munson:** Thank you, senator, for your comments.

First of all, I don't think you can put a price on inclusion.

**Senator Lankin:** I agree.

**Senator Munson:** For example, in the Down's syndrome community or the Special Olympics environment or people with other different needs, long ago a lot of people were excluded from society. I'm reminded of what my old boss Mr. Chrétien once told me about people with special needs. He said that if you create an environment where you build the ramp to a job – not the physical ramp but the cultural ramp to a job – you have more taxpayers. You contribute to an economy. So there's no price on inclusion. In fact, I think we all benefit at the end of the day with that.

I have to admit – I guess I'm a poor politician in that way – that I have to learn from that question. I do know from the disability community that they were the ones that said to the minister that you have to involve the provinces in these consultations. What about the cities and other folks? I guess that really has to be part of it too. Because when you're changing things like the way we're doing with banking – federal banks – or the way you're getting onto an aircraft or a train – VIA Rail has changed its ways incredibly these days regarding how they allow accessibility.

(1720)

That's well and good, but if you don't have it across the board, you will still have that siloed environment. In the autism community, as I keep fighting for a national autism strategy, you get programs put into place, but we're not thinking along the same holistic environment the same way all the time.

When it comes to the private sector, where do they fit in? What are they doing now? This is a chance to lead and learn from the disability community. I think the minister – talking off the top of my head because I'm a poor politician like that. Perhaps I'm not supposed to be saying these things, but I've always said what I've wanted to anyway in my life. The federal minister must sit down with each province and sit down with municipalities, because there are areas of responsibility within the municipalities, and say, "Look, here are the standards that have been put together by this new – hopefully – law. These are the standards the disability community has put together. What do you

think of those standards working for you at city hall? How do you think these standards will be, or how can we improve them, at city hall, at Queen's Park and that sort of thing?"

There are no borders when it comes to inclusion, so that would be my hope.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Senator Munson, your time has expired. Are you asking for another five minutes?

**Senator Munson:** Yes.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Is it agreed, honourable senators?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**Hon. Ratna Omidvar:** Thank you, Senator Munson, for sharing your personal experiences. I, too, was enormously moved. I commend you on your leadership.

I have the privilege today of meeting with members of FALA. When you said, "No wrong door," it triggered a conversation we had. This is coming from them, and I'd like to share it with my colleagues and to ask you for your response. They said — and I have to think about it carefully — that the no-wrong-door approach, in theory, is a very inclusive approach, but in practice, it can lead to a certain amount of chaos and no arrival at the destination, because there is no one to guide you through whichever door you tend to open. They were referring to the experience of Ontario and the mental health strategy in Ontario, where Ontario, too — and I apologize again; I'm from Ontario; that's my background — where the no-wrong-door approach is complemented with a navigation specialist, a sort of concierge who will guide you through this maze, so to say.

Was that brought up in committee? What is your response to that concern of the advocates? What do you think?

**Senator Munson:** I think I mentioned in the speech about technical experts and other people being consulted throughout the disability community and getting ideas from them. We have to be brave. We have to be curious. I've always felt, sometimes, as a former journalist, whether as a foreign correspondent — I was always curious what was down that road. Sometimes down that road, there weren't very many nice things to see, and it was chaos. But you have to take that road sometimes. You have to take that chance.

I think we have to be brave about doing these things. We're on a new road right now, aren't we? It's a road we've never been on before. We've never had this before. This is laying a cornerstone for us to build upon and move forward.

I think that I sincerely have to — and I've talked, of course, with Bill and Jane of FALA here over many years — and I have to sit down myself and understand about being fearless and opening that door.

Yes, there will be some difficulties along the way. We can't afford not to take the chance or the opportunity.

**Hon. Elaine McCoy:** Senator Munson, would you take another question?

**Senator Munson:** Yes, of course.

**Senator McCoy:** I have an accolade. I, too, am one of your great admirers — I have been for years — in the work you have been doing in this field. You have a talent for not only increasing awareness but also taking action, which I commend greatly.

I want to ask a question, but first, let me preface it with a personal experience. Like Senator Jaffer, I have become recently sensitized to accessibility issues. Today, I walked into this lovely new building for the very first time. I walked through five doors, I think. On each one of those doors, I had to use my security card. On three of the doors, I was able to push the handicapped buttons. On two of the doors I couldn't – the northern corridor. Indeed, if I didn't have somebody with me, I wouldn't have been able to move those doors at all; they were too heavy.

This is my question: Will this act apply to the Senate? It's not an easy question, because we always like to say we're masters and mistresses of our own internal affairs. Please consider the question.

**Senator Munson:** Thank you. As I mentioned, Senator McCoy, we love our new building and new environment, but we've also discovered some of the difficulties. Facing those stairs sometimes – yes, there's an elevator down there, but if you're facing the stairs to the front door, if that is the front door – I don't know, because I stayed to talk near the front door this afternoon.

To your question, of course it applies to the Senate of Canada. As I mentioned, it applies to Parliament, and Parliament includes us, because we are the upper house. As the upper house, we have the opportunity to build upon what the 74 amendments the other side proposed. Remember, it was approved by the other side, but there were 74 amendments before that committee, and it was a vigorous debate at that time. I know that there are a lot of people with a lot of good ideas here, so let's look at every good idea and put it together. But it will apply to the Senate.

**Senator McCoy:** Thank you.

**The Hon. the Acting Speaker:** Senator Munson, your time has expired.

(On motion of Senator Martin, debate adjourned.)  
(1730)