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Barriers to Government Employment Experienced by Disabled Persons

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to discuss the issue of disability awareness. I listened quite closely to Minister Miltenberger's statement yesterday on the occasion of Disability Awareness Week. The theme, Mr. Speaker, this year is Living, Working and Educating Together – Include People with Disabilities.

Mr. Speaker I want to start by acknowledging the good work of organizations like the NWT Council of Persons with Disabilities and EmployABILITY, who provide such valuable services to many of our residents. Noticeably absent from the Minister's statement yesterday was how the Government of the Northwest Territories plugs in and participates in including persons with disabilities in our own public service.

In his ad that appeared in the local press this week recognizing Disability Awareness Week, he states, "I encourage everyone to be inclusive of individuals with disabilities and recognize the contributions they provide within our communities throughout the territory."

It would seem that Minister Miltenberger and his colleagues on Cabinet have much to learn about how inclusive and how accepting the Government of the Northwest Territories is when it comes to hiring persons with disabilities in our own public service. The old adage that one should lead by example certainly comes to mind and I am going to give Cabinet a clear and concise message today that when it comes to leadership in the inclusion of persons with disabilities, they have an incredibly abysmal record.

Disabled persons make up 13 percent of our population. Yet, as a group within the public service of the GNWT, they represent .4 percent. Yes, .4 percent. This from a government which continues to preach inclusion. The government should be ashamed of themselves.

Let's look at the lead departments, Mr. Speaker. FMBS has a grand total of zero employees with a disability. The newly minted Human Resources department responsible for the government policy in the area of human resources has – surprise, surprise – zero employees with a disability.

In all of the GNWT reports in the public service from 1996 to 2004, there is not one single, solitary sentence about the Government of the Northwest Territories' efforts to hire disabled persons. Perhaps the Minister responsible for the public service can look through these reports and he'll note that there is no text on efforts to hire disabled persons.

As the Human Resources department likes to display in any literature that I have read, they like to flaunt the affirmative action policy. Mr. Speaker, disabled individuals are second only to indigenous aboriginal persons in that policy. Mr. Speaker, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that .4 percent representation of arguably the most disadvantaged community – and that is in terms of employment, income and education in the territory that, remember, comprises 13 percent of our population – is completely unacceptable.

The Government of the Northwest Territories has made hundreds of direct appointments in the past 10 years to many priority one individuals, yet research I have would indicate that only one – that is one – direct appointment to an individual that had a disability.

Mr. Speaker, I intend to hear from the Minister responsible for the public service today why disabled individuals continue to face barriers when trying to gain employment with this government. Thank you.

---Applause