

PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONSIDERATIONS

Timetable

1. The House of Commons sub-committee on Equality Rights examining federal laws and policies to determine whether they conform with Section 15 of the Constitution is scheduled to make its report public on 23 Oct. The report, according to some initial press reports is expected to be somewhat critical of CF policies governing issues such as women in combat and homosexuals. Undoubtedly, the media and Parliamentarians will seek to bring about a full discussion of these issues before the public.

The Public Environment

2. The public environment has been swayed by the active publicity surrounding possible initiatives in the realm of women's rights. Myths have been created to the effect that women are denied employment and promotion in modern «push-button» forces and that Canada's forces are not in step with other armies of the world. Recent Gallup poll results indicate that 54 per cent of Canadian adults (56 per cent of women) think women should be employed in combat roles.

3. Questions of homosexuality are likewise misunderstood. However this issue is less likely to generate emotional public criticism of DND's position.

4. The public is particularly ill-prepared to comprehend any discussion of group cohesion or motivation in battle.

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These factors, important though they be, are easily turned to ridicule by activists and should be avoided in public discussion of either women's rights or homosexual rights.

Public Information Options

5. There are two public information options.

- a. Passive. DND could resist providing information on equality-related questions until a final position had been decided by the government. The danger in this approach is that the current myths would be further reinforced by the wave of media attention which will inevitably be given to these issues. This approach would make the government's decision more difficult and is not recommended.
- b. Provision of Background Information. DND could provide information to interested media which would help correct some of the erroneous public beliefs...without involving the Department in a polemic about the actual recommendations of the sub-committee or compromising an eventual decision. This approach would prepare the public to better understand and support a government decision and is recommended.

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Recommended Public Information Approach

6. As an initial response, selected spokespersons will state that the committee's report and its recommendations have just been published and that they will be examined in detail. The government is entitled to 120 days to respond to such a report and the DND/CF will provide input to the overall government response.

7. Separately from discussion of the recommendations, DND will continue to routinely provide information on the situation of women in the Canadian Forces, using the following themes:

- a. The Canadian Forces are very progressive in regard to the employment of women. Women, who are now employed in a wide variety of trades and classifications, make-up 8.9 per cent of the Regular Force and 15.6 per cent of the Department's overall civilian and military strength. The Canadian Forces will continue with a gradual but systematic approach in expanding new employment opportunities for women;
- b. There is no institutional barrier preventing women from rising to the most senior ranks (in the non-combat branches). Since the role of women in the Canadian Forces has only expanded in the last 15 years, the number of women serving in.

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senior positions is naturally limited,
but it is steadily increasing;

- c. Formal promotion opportunities are based on merit and are equal for men and women within their classifications and trades;
- d. Current policy might well offer the best opportunity for large numbers of women to serve in the CF. If the Canadian Forces were to adopt gender-free physical standards the end result could actually be a decrease in the level of women employed in the Canadian Forces; modern warfare requirements has not reduced, but increased, the physical demands made on combatants and the large majority of women, currently able to enrol, might not be able to meet such physical standards required of men; and
- e. Canada is a world leader in the employment of women in the military. Within NATO, only the United States with 9.5% has a higher percentage of women in military service. Of all the countries of the world, fewer than five are known to have a higher percentage of women in their armed forces. (Israel, where women comprise 10% of the armed forces, bars women from any assignments that involve risk of combat). In fact, those

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countries which have no restrictions on the employment of women have very few of them in military service i.e. Belgium 3.8%, The Netherlands 1.4% and Norway 1.2%.

8. On the issue of homosexuals and the Canadian Forces, the following information would be made available:

- a. Members of the Canadian Forces frequently are subjected to living conditions that offer little or no privacy such as barracks, isolated posts, etc. This close social contact could encourage homosexual advances and, conversely, these same conditions can raise the sensitivity and intolerance of other members to the presence of homosexuals;
- b. In the past the public has not considered, as a suitable environment for friends, sons or daughters, a force which approved the retention of homosexuals, particularly in positions of authority, given the requirement for obedience, discipline and the close living conditions that characterize the military community.
- c. Other NATO members, such as the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom, have similar policies.

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9. In short, the current Canadian Forces policies on the employment of women in combat and of homosexuals must be presented as being positive and reasonable. This approach will inform the public and help it to respond favourably to a government decision on equality rights which gives due regard to military requirements.