

## QUEEN'S SPEECH – HUNTING FIGHT DELAYS DISABILITY BILL

The Government has included the Disability Discrimination Bill (DDB) in today's Queen's Speech, having failed to introduce the Bill into Parliament in the previous session.

So much Parliamentary time was expended on battles over the Hunting Bill that the Government did not have time to fit the Bill into the previous session and concerns have now been raised about whether the Bill, which is a Labour manifesto commitment, will be completed before an election is called.

John Knight, head of policy at disability charity Leonard Cheshire said: "It is both ridiculous and appalling that Parliament got itself so tied up in knots about hunting that such a vitally important piece of legislation as the DDB is simply left behind. Now disabled people just have to hope that the politicians don't get so wrapped up in themselves that they forget about the Bill again."

The Leader of the House of Commons, Peter Hain MP, blamed the delays on the Conservatives in the House of Lords saying that "it is with great disappointment that we discovered that the Opposition in the House of Lords is trying to block its early progress" (*Official Report*, Column 1031, 21 October 2004).

The Conservative opposition blame the Government for choosing to introduce the Hunting Bill before the DDB. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott MP today described hunting as an unimportant issue that had "nothing to do with modern Britain".

John Knight said: "Whatever the party politics, it is disabled people that will suffer. Delaying our civil rights to score political points over hunting is disgraceful – the DDB should already be progressing, now that it has been announced in the Queen's Speech it must be at the very top of the Government's agenda."

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#### Notes to Editors:

1. The Disability Discrimination Bill has already passed through all the required pre-legislative stages. The Joint Committee into the Bill published its recommendations on 27 May 2004 and the Government produced its response on 15 July 2004. Links to the Bill in draft form and to the Committee's recommendations can be found at: <http://www.disability.gov.uk/legislation/ddb/draft-ddb.asp>
2. Leonard Cheshire ([www.leonard-cheshire.org](http://www.leonard-cheshire.org)) is the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of support to disabled people. It supports over 21,000 disabled people in the UK (85% in own homes, 15% in care homes) offering flexible services to meet their needs. The charity campaigns for the rights of disabled people in the UK and raises awareness of the issues affecting them. The charity also works with disabled people in 57 countries worldwide working in partnership with more than 255 autonomous and locally managed services and organisations.

Leonard Cheshire offers care at home services; care homes with and without nursing, including respite care; day services including resource centres and mobile day centres; independent/supported living units; acquired brain injury rehabilitation services; recreational services and education, training and employment support through Workability and jobability.com.